



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

Mother's of Religion





MOTHERS OF SCRIPTURE.



MOTHERS OF SCRIPTURE

For Mothers' Meetings.

BY

MRS. GOODWIN HATCHARD,

AUTHOR OF

'EIGHT YEARS' EXPERIENCE IN MOTHERS' MEETINGS.'

'PRAYERS FOR LITTLE CHILDREN.'

Second Series.



"Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours,
And ask them what report they bore to Heaven."

Young.

LONDON:
HATCHARDS, PICCADILLY.

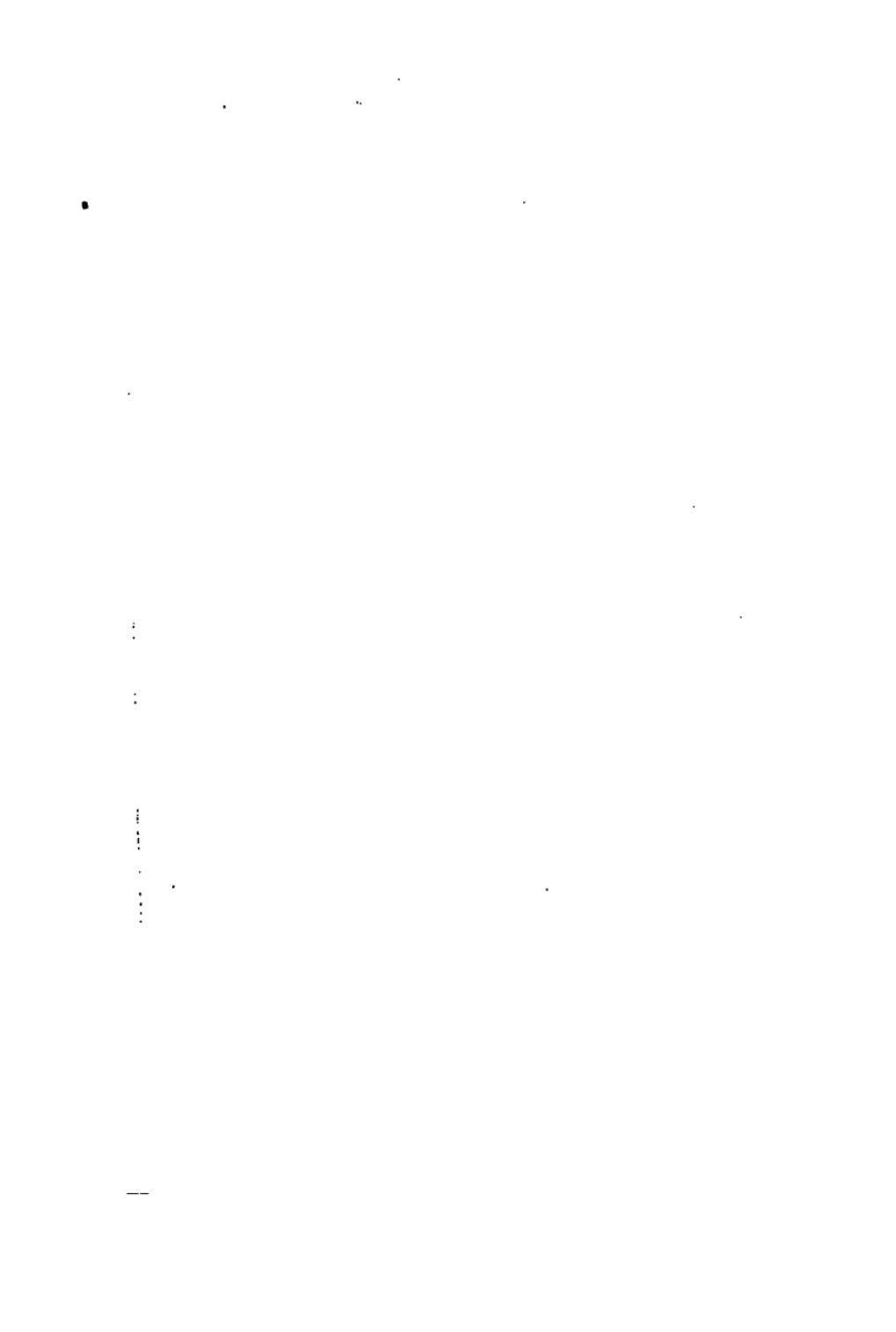
1875.

141. m. 350

LONDON

Printed by JOHN STRANGEWAYS, Castle St. Leicester Sq.

IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE
OF
THE FAITHFUL PASTOR, THE TENDER HUSBAND,
AND WISE COUNSELLOR,
UNDER WHOSE
SUGGESTION, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND GUIDANCE
These Mothers' Meetings
WERE BEGUN AND CARRIED ON;
This little Book
IS INSCRIBED BY HER,
WHOM HIS EARLY DEATH IN A FAR DISTANT LAND
HAS LEFT A MOURNING WIDOW,
'SORROWFUL INDEED, YET ALWAY REJOICING,'
IN HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE JUST,
WHEN THE MASTER, WHOSE HE WAS, AND WHOM HE SERVED,
'SHALL GATHER TOGETHER IN ONE
THE CHILDREN OF GOD, THAT ARE SCATTERED ABROAD.'



CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	ix
 PART I.	
EVE TEMPTED	I
EVE THE FALLEN	15
SARAH, THE MOTHER OF GOD'S CHOSEN RACE	30
REBEKAH, MOTHER OF JACOB	53
RUTH, ANCESTRESS OF DAVID	77
HANNAH, MOTHER OF SAMUEL	93
 PART II.	
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MOTHER	112
THE WIDOWED MOTHER OF NAIN	136
DORCAS, A MOTHER TO THE POOR	147
SALOME, THE MOTHER OF SAINTS	157
 BOOKS SUITABLE TO BE READ AT MOTHERS' MEETINGS 169	



INTRODUCTION.

THE importance, usefulness, and necessity, of 'Mothers' Meetings,' are now almost universally acknowledged throughout the parishes of our land, and in many they have been established as an indispensable portion of the Parochial system.

In other places the desire to organise them is great, the need of them urgent, but, from various causes the Pastor's wife (especially if young) often shrinks from the formidable undertaking. She, perhaps, does not know even how to commence or carry on the good and useful work, in which, having once but fairly started, she would delight to labour amongst the Mothers living around her home.

It is strange, indeed, that in this age, when such a multitude of books are written upon common and uncommon subjects, for people of all classes, ages, and conditions, so few are to be

found capable of materially assisting the Clergyman's wife in organising and conducting 'Mothers' Meetings.'

When, many years ago, I felt an earnest desire to commence them, I inquired in all directions among my friends, both Clerical and Lay, for some prescribed plan, and was ever met by the discouraging reply that they did not know of such a guide for the purpose, but had themselves heard many a young Pastoress express a wish for similar assistance at the outset of the holy work.

It is, then, to meet what I myself felt, and very many others still feel, to be a requirement, that I have ventured simply and unpretendingly to put together some thoughts which I have week by week brought before the members of my own 'Mothers' Meetings' during the eight years of happy intercourse which we enjoyed, accompanied by a few rules for guidance and routine.

This little book is offered only to the young and inexperienced, whom I have often heard exclaiming, 'I wish I could begin "Mothers' Meetings;"' or, 'I do not know how to manage them or to conduct them;' or, again, 'I fear I have no gift for speaking to others. What kind of things could I say to them without giving offence?'

Dear fellow-workers, after much time, anxious thought, and earnest prayer, given to the subject of how to render two hours once every week profitable, interesting, and pleasant to our cottagers, I

made out my scheme ; and the results have encouraged me to hope that my little programme succeeded fairly well.

Believe me that the best talents and qualifications for these holy duties are, love to Christ and to His people, and an earnest longing to bring sinners to Him for pardon and peace, in a loving, sisterlike spirit !

Be not discouraged in well-doing. We serve a good Master who knows that all have not the same gifts, and who has said, ‘If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God.’

If, in the great day He can say of you and of me, ‘She hath done what she could,’ we shall be blessed of Him who has given us this injunction, ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.’

It may most effectually answer the purpose with which, at the request of valued friends, this little manual is written if I now subjoin a somewhat detailed account of the manner in which I conducted the Mothers’ Meetings ; and with this view I will ask my readers to accompany me, in imagination, to the servants’ hall at the Rectory, where I held them.

I am fully aware that they are far more generally held in a schoolroom or public room, and sometimes in the vestry of the parish Church ; but admirably as they may be there arranged, the homelike, domestic, social features, cannot be

maintained, which I know, by long experience, to be a very important point in this work.

We desire to see the mothers at their ease, to obtain their confidence, to win their affections; and in the privacy, quietness, and retirement, of a home, we are reasonably the most hopeful of attaining this end.

If there is not a Servants' hall, or a 'Parish-room,' the latter of which is now generally to be found in modern Rectories, the kitchen might be made available for the purpose, or even the dining-room, although either of these arrangements would require some management and self-denial, probably, from all the Clergyman's family on that day, such as an alteration of the usual hours for luncheon or dinner, and divers small difficulties will at once present themselves to a practical mind, but which, by a small amount of accommodation, can be easily and pleasantly overcome.

On the 3rd of January, in the year 1858, on a bright frosty Friday afternoon, I held my first meeting, and with a throbbing head and trembling heart, entered the room, where fifteen 'Mothers' had assembled together.

It was a large, cheerful, airy apartment. The walls were papered with a white tile paper, covered with blue fleur-de-lys. It was fitted up with oak seats all round the room, planned on the same principle as the leaves of a table, so that they could be put up or down at pleasure.

Upon these low forms they were all seated. A large blazing fire makes all look and feel comfortably warm, and the aged, the feeble, and the rheumatic, sit near the fireside ; those who are delicate, away from the door and windows ; any whose sight is growing dim, nearest to the light ; and plenty of hassocks are placed to support the ‘feeble knees.’

In the centre of the room is a large table, and on it lies the Best of Books—ready opened at the passage which I have selected for meditation—a book of Common Prayer, some forty Hymn-books,* beside which each mother was asked to bring her own. There is also a Day-book for entering names every week ; another for keeping drapery accounts ; a pile of cards for the entry of each purchaser’s name—each retaining her own card—with weekly deposits upon them, envelopes for those cards, plenty of pieces of paper upon which to write their names to identify their own pieces of work (which they always leave at the Rectory until completed), a large inkstand, pens and blotting-paper, reels of cotton of all qualities, twelve ‘housewives,’ with needles of all sizes, half-a-dozen pincushions, twelve pairs of scissors, having on each a label bearing the words, ‘Mothers’ Meeting,’ written on white tape fastened on to them, with fifty thimbles to fit fingers of any dimensions.

* I recommend that of the Christian Knowledge Society for use at ‘Mothers’ Meetings.’

Of any and all these articles the mothers can have the use, but they are replaced upon the table before they leave the room.

The windows are full of flowers, and after a week or two I always found some flowers upon the table also, brought by the kindness of the mothers, who knew my fondness for these luxuries of God's goodness. Violets, or lilies of the valley, roses and mignonette in bunches, would scent the room deliciously. There are ornaments upon the mantelpiece, and pictures hang around the walls to give a homelike appearance to the room and to promote sociability. A clock is opposite to me placed upon a carved bracket.

On one side of the room there is a large wooden slab which is covered with rolls of calico of various qualities and prices, both bleached and unbleached, with sheetings of different kinds, and flannels. Upon this slab are also placed a huge pair of 'cutting-out' scissors and a yard-measure. I engaged, to assist me, a young widow, to whom I gave sixpence at each meeting, whose duties were to measure off the quantities of material, and help to cut out for those who were unable to cut to advantage for themselves. After this first meeting she gives the parcel of work to each mother, as they were left by them, and they at once commence working, having generally arrived half-an-hour before the appointed time.

As half-past two strikes I go into the bright

room, where all rise and curtsey at my entrance, and the less timid give me ‘the time of day,’ as they call their kindly greetings. I only smile, and bow all round, and at once taking my seat and they theirs, proceed to the secular business, calling the mothers’ names alphabetically. The first time we met, the confusion, caused by all pressing together to purchase calico and flannel, induced me to suggest this plan ; and as I found, after further experience, that several among them deplored their surnames, commencing with the final letters of the alphabet, W or Y, I alternated, one week beginning with the A, B, C, &c. first, the next week with Y, W, V ; and thus jealousies were avoided and all were satisfied that they received equal attention.

I here subjoin a few very simple rules which I adopted for their purchases :—

I. When calico or flannel is bought, a deposit not under 3*d.* must be paid.

II. Only one purchase can be going on at a time, by the same person ; viz. not calico and flannel together.

III. Money must never be borrowed of one another.

IV. Mothers must try to pay a small sum at each meeting, but on no account to absent themselves because cash is scarce.

V. Articles must not be taken to their homes until the material is paid for.

VI. All debts must be paid up at the close of each session.

I gave them twopence off every shilling as a little assistance, and they often remarked, ‘Yours is the cheapest shop I know, ma’am!’ or, ‘Your goods are not like most cheap goods; they are first-rate articles;’ or, ‘I am afraid you don’t get very rich by selling to us, ma’am!’

When I had gone through the alphabet, we locked our door; and the account-books being closed, and all work laid down, I gave out the Hymn which I had chosen, and all stood up to sing.

Discordant, indeed, were the sounds at first produced from many voices; but very amicably they bore correction, and even illustration of grace-notes introduced, of twist and turns and nasal twang. I then sang the tune over to them, as they had sung it, and afterwards endeavoured to show them the composer’s tune; and most perseveringly and anxiously they strove to copy the pattern, which I tried to produce for their imitation, being delighted when conscious of improvement.

After a while their voices blended quite harmoniously, and were even melodious (“distance lending some enchantment to the sound”),* as friends used to testify who were strolling in the

* ‘Sweetest melodies are those
That are by distance made more sweet.’

Rectory garden, and heard, through the open windows, the strains of hearty music, ascending into the ear of Him whose praises the mothers loved to sing.

I taught them the tunes most commonly sung in Churches, that they might themselves join in this part of public worship without disturbing others by singing out of time and out of tune. This, many are apt thoughtlessly to do, who have enjoyed greater advantages of education than these cottagers had in their childhood, when singing was not taught as it is now.

The hymn concluded, I read one of the beautiful Collects of our Church, and taught them a short text of Scripture to carry away with them, and ponder over fervently in their homes. I liked to know that thus they must commit to memory some thirty texts a-year, through these gatherings alone.

All then took their seats, sitting always in the same places. I read to them the portion of God's Holy Word which I had selected, and talked to them as simply as I could upon it, offering the remarks which I had most prayerfully and carefully prepared beforehand for their instruction. I encouraged them to ask me questions or further explanations, which, after a little while, they constantly did, often exhibiting a degree of intelligence and thoughtfulness which it was most gratifying and interesting to witness.

I always, during the previous week, had made very copious notes upon the subject, to be brought before them, and took care to have all the principal points well imprinted upon my memory ; but I never took the notes into the meetings, as these would greatly have fettered me in addressing them, when all eyes were fixed upon me. But these notes have enabled me to recollect and write out the subjects which we went through together.

To be very plain in language requires much thought and practice ; and this I made an essential study, always employing the simplest Saxon I could find, to make mysteries clear and comprehensible to the mothers.*

While the Word of God was read and explained to them the needlework was laid aside, and it was pleasing to see the general anxiety, when a new comer joined our meetings, that she should at once fall in with this suggestion, and the eagerness with which, if she innocently went on working, they would whisper to her, ‘The good lady don’t like us to work while she reads out of the Bible ;’ or,

* After six years of these happy meetings, in the year 1865 the kind mothers all subscribed, entirely without my knowledge, and presented me with a splendid Bible, annotated and paragraphed, with the names of the donors written inside, and an inscription in gold letters upon the outside, too flattering in its expressions to be here transcribed, lest I should be thought egotistical ; fearing this, I should not have mentioned their valued gift, but that this little book *will probably be purchased by some of my old friends* ; and

'Put your work away, and we will tell you why afterwards.'

This Scriptural instruction generally lasted about twenty minutes. The meditation ended, we engaged in Prayer, remembering ever before God their ministers, husbands, parents, children, relations and friends, the sick, the suffering, the dying and the bereaved, travellers by land and by water, the chosen people of God who still continue in ignorance of the true Messiah, and the heathen who know not God.

They then resumed their seats and their needle-work, while I entered all their names in my Day Book, inquiring the cause of the non-appearance of absent members from those whom I knew to be friends or neighbours. This completed, I read to them a 'Story Book' until half-past four o'clock.

I transcribe a list of some books suitable for this purpose, and which I found they much enjoyed. I add to it some of a more recent date, which I feel assured would give pleasure, and at the same time profit.

if the 'Mothers' goodness was altogether omitted, they might not ascribe it to the true feeling, but deem me ungrateful and forgetful of their kindness. From this motive I must add that at Easter, 1868, they also gave me a large and beautiful Photographic Album, with a group of all the 'Mothers' taken in front of a bank of wild flowers in the Rectory garden, and a separate *carte* of each one of them,—proving their gratitude for the very small efforts made for them.

There is often much difficulty in selecting books for these meetings; some are too deep and grave in character, others too childish, light, or flippant.

Here, again, I often stopped, and addressed remarks on questions to them as we went along, and they would do the same, and exclaim sometimes, ‘Oh, ain’t that lovely?’—‘Now, isn’t that true?’—‘That’s just what I’m always a-saying to my husband, or daughter, or son.’—‘Oh! that’s just what I was a-thinking;’ or, ‘Please, ma’am, read that pretty piece over again!’

Often, on looking up, I saw the needle-work laid down on the lap, while they sat with eyes, ears, and even mouths, wide open, as though drinking in every word!

Sometimes I glanced at the clock opposite to me, feeling by my tired voice that the limited time had elapsed, and then they would say, ‘Oh, please, ma’am, don’t look near that clock, it’s always too fast;’ or, ‘Surely it can’t be time to go yet;’ or, ‘Do read to us a little longer, if you are not tired;’ but, to the minute, I closed the book.

We then sang another Hymn before dispersing, and, after it, all departed.

I stationed myself at the open door of the room, and shook hands with each as they passed out. All thanked me, with varying, but ever-grateful expressions for their happy afternoon. As they were nearly all old friends, we soon became

thoroughly at ease together, and the more quickly, because I was the only lady in the room, never admitting even my own family to assist me, feeling that any one of them being present would make us all shy and reserved. As it was, I never, throughout the eight years during which I held 'Mothers' Meetings,' lost the anxious feelings of solemn, deep, responsibility. Through being alone with them, I soon felt that I could address them plainly, seriously, and earnestly; nor did I ever in a single instance hear of their having been hurt or offended at anything I had said to them.

They attended regularly, punctually, and joyfully, in snow and rain, in fair and in rough weather, and often assured me that they eagerly looked forward to the six winter months,* and to their cheerful afternoons of enjoyment, rest, and refreshment at the Rectory, counting the days until they recurred.

I had the gatherings during these six months only, because when haymaking and harvesting came on they would, in many cases, be otherwise occupied; and when the weather became warm the atmosphere of the room, filled with some thirty or forty persons, would become unhealthy.

They assembled at two o'clock, P.M. on every Friday, and I never absented myself, except for illness, when a sister took my place.

I chose Friday afternoons, because many among

* From November to April.

the mothers were laundresses, and could by that day in the week, with a little extra effort, complete their labours;—thus pleasing their employers, as well as their husbands and themselves, by taking home the result of their week's work to its destination early, and leaving Saturday free for home duties, and due preparation for the Sunday.

I chose the hour of two, because husbands and sons had then gone to work, and the dinner things had been washed up after the midday meal, tea prepared for their return, and the children deposited at the various Parochial schools in safety, to remain until fetched by their mothers, at four o'clock.

To evening meetings many people seriously object, and with good reasons, as the lonely husband, or son, is tempted to seek company and amusement away from his deserted home, although the wife had only gone to get good for her own immortal soul, and, we trust, sometimes to take back a ‘word in season for them.’

In my own district one day, a fine, tall, stalwart young fellow accosted me thus: ‘Really, ma’am, the women seem so to enjoy them “Mothers’ Meetings,” it do seem a pity you don’t have “Fathers’ Meetings” too.’* I pointed out to my

* For suggestions upon this point, and for instances of ‘Fathers’ Meetings’ being successfully carried on, see ‘God’s Message in Low London,’ by L. N. R., pp. 42–50.

friend the difficulty of the men being at work in the daytime. He quickly rejoined, 'But why not have 'em at noights, ma'am?' I said, 'We fear you might some of you be tempted to go into the public-houses on your way home.' He shook his head knowingly, and replied, 'Ah, well, I believe you are right; I know I would not trust myself, and it would be an awful pity to go in and p'raps take a drop too much after hearing the Bible and all them good things you reads to my missus.'

At our first meeting we were fifteen in number, and by the end of the first session I had upon my books 157 names, the average attendance being from thirty to forty, which latter number were as many as our servants' hall would conveniently hold and comfortably accommodate.

I should have had many more names registered, but that babies were not admitted at any age, as the undivided attention of a mother can never be secured; when she is engrossed, in keeping either a fretful, or a merry baby, from crying or playing.

In this, as in many other points, plans, and arrangements, and particulars, my friends, who hold Mothers' Meetings, may, and do, differ widely from me; but I only relate my own experiences, as I bought them, after a long trial.

During the course of our meetings I took various subjects for Scriptural instruction; for the

opening year I selected the Parables of our Lord, as containing His own usual method for conveying Divine truth to His people when on earth ; the second year, 'The Holy Men of Old ;' the third, 'The Women of Scripture ;' the fourth, 'The Children in Scripture ;' the fifth, 'The Miracles of Christ ;' the sixth, 'The Fruits of the Spirit ;' the seventh, 'The Sermon on the Mount ;' the eighth, 'Miscellaneous passages and subjects.'

As I am thankful to believe that my little book entitled 'Eight Years' Experience in Mothers' Meetings,' has already proved useful to many, in commencing their labours of love, I have continued the series, and now take as my subject, the MOTHERS OF SCRIPTURE, trusting they may prove as interesting, and as profitable for meditation, as did the PARABLES OF OUR LORD, illustrated by Eastern customs, which were the subjects of our first year's consideration and instruction ; and I shall hope, if God spare my life, to continue the series hereafter.

MOTHERS' MEETINGS.

EVE TEMPTED.

TEXT.

'AND Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.'—GEN. iii. 20.

COLLECT.

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

By the goodness of our God we are all spared to meet once more, dear sisters, at these happy, pleasant 'Mothers' Meetings.' I heartily and affectionately welcome you, one and all, old friends and

new faces. It gives me great pleasure to see you again at these gatherings.

I trust that, by Divine help, even by the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, I may not only be permitted to interest you in what I read out of the Sacred Scriptures, but also to do some real good to your never-dying souls. This, you well know, is my most earnest desire and prayer to God for you.

Most of you will remember that the subjects of our last year's meditations were the 'Parables of our Lord,' in which they were illustrated by Eastern manners and customs. You appeared greatly interested: they seemed so real, because I was able to tell you of what I myself had seen, having had the privilege of living for five years upon Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the Holy 'City of the Great King.' When we parted, many of you assured me that the Bible seemed to you now as a new book, for you could enter into and understand many things which before appeared to you strange.

In this year's meetings I intend to bring before your attention subjects peculiarly interesting and suitable for us to consider, namely, some of the principal 'Mothers of the Bible,' beginning the course with the first mother ever created by God, —EVE.

Dear friends, come back with me now in thought several thousand years to a scene of

beauty, joy, and happiness, such as we can but faintly picture, to the loveliest garden ever made on this, our beauteous earth, even to the Garden of Eden.

The exact site of the Garden is not known; but we are told that it was to the east of Canaan, and close to the rivers of Tigris and Euphrates. In this ‘well-watered Garden’ God planted every tree that is pleasant to the sight and ‘good for food,’ as well as every choicest flower, and plant, and herb. So perfect in beauty was the Garden of Eden, that in the Scriptures you will find that the fairest, choicest spots are compared to the ‘Garden of God,’ as it is called by the prophet Ezekiel.*

Amid these beautiful Surrey hills, we consider our fertile gardens—glowing and gay with flowers of every hue—are lovely beyond all others in this highly-favoured land of England; but you can scarcely imagine what a well-watered garden can be, sparkling under the brilliancy of the glorious Eastern sunshine. Such a garden surrounded our house at Jaffa (the Joppa of the Bible), where we used frequently to go from Jerusalem, from which it was distant some forty miles, to escape the heat, and to enjoy the pure sea-breezes of the Mediterranean, which came up close to us.

There abounded the lofty, graceful palm-tree,

* Ezek. xxviii. 13, 14; xxxi. 8, 9. Gen. xiii. 10.

laden with rich, ripe dates, the orange, the lemon, the pomegranate, the olive, and the flowering myrtle; while above them all towered the noble, stately cedar of Lebanon in its dark, frowning grandeur. How I wish I could take you all now to walk in that garden, just as I see it in the eye of happy memory!

In the perfect Garden of Eden, then, God placed Adam, the first man, whom 'He had formed out of the dust of the ground,' 'to dress it and to keep it.' Man, therefore, even when in a state of innocence, was not to be an idle being. It was God's will, and, certainly, for his happiness, that he should work. 'My Father worketh, and I work,' were the words even of our Saviour Himself. 'Man's idle time is the Devil's working time' is a true and useful proverb. Believe me, that one of our greatest earthly blessings is to have plenty of work to do for God and for man. Even in Paradise man must work.

In the midst of the Garden of Eden God placed the 'tree of life' and the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil,' and gave Adam but one single command. 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'

We think that this death here threatened was not only the death of the body, but the loss of the

soul also ; for this would give room for the exercise of God's great mercy in the future redemption of the world by Jesus Christ.

Now, even in Paradise, God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him an help-meet for him.' Man needed some companion who had a soul and a spiritual nature like his own, which even the noblest of the animals had not.

God was ever full of love and tenderness to His creatures, and knew that Adam needed one addition, and one only, to his great happiness, namely, a *friend*—nay, more, a *wife*, with whom he could talk and converse.

For the 'mutual society, help, and comfort which the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity,' God created a woman ; and that Adam might more entirely love and value her she 'was taken out of man' (being taken out of his side near to his heart), and so was literally 'bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.' Our Church has well said that 'Marriage is an honourable estate instituted of God in the time of man's innocence.'

'God threw Adam into a deep sleep, and took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof ; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.'

What must have been Adam's surprise and joy when he awoke, and found her by his side ! Eve

was, we know, a lovely creature, perfect in form and in mind, as well as in body. She was a true help-meet for her husband, a companion ever by his side. Not trampled under his feet, as the wife is but too often, even in our land of civilization; or a slave to him, as in heathen countries women are to this day.

Loved by her husband, sharing all his happiness (not his sorrows, in those days, for he had not any), they did not know a grief and never shed a tear. All day they worked happily together, never wearied by their labour. Then they wandered sometimes by the river's side, plucking the varied delicious fruits and flowers, and praising the goodness of their Creator from whose bounteous hand they had received all things richly to enjoy. No quarrelling, no disputing, marred their perfect happiness. They truly loved God, and, as yet, without dread of Him; for they had no cause to be afraid of Him in these days of innocence.

But how soon, how sadly must this fair scene be changed! Satan, the spirit of evil, already banished from the presence of God, hating to see them thus blessed, envious of their happiness, determined to mar it.* He saw Eve one day walking alone, and in the form of a serpent, which was more 'subtil,' or 'sly,' 'than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made,'

* 1 Pet. v. 8.

tempted her to disobey her God and Creator, and to eat of the forbidden fruit.

He began, you observe, by putting into her mind doubts of God's kindness and mercy. 'Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the Garden?' By even listening thus to the Serpent, Eve laid herself open to temptation's snares. God had most plainly and distinctly warned her, 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' Satan, who was 'a liar from the beginning,' said to her, 'Ye shall not surely die,' pretending that he knew better than God, the All-wise, her Creator, her Father, her best Friend.

'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant,' says the sinner in the Book of Proverbs.* This one tree seemed to Eve the one desire of her heart; more pleasant to the eye, more tempting to the palate, when once forbidden by God.

She also desired to be wiser than God had seen fit, in His wisdom, to make her. She saw that it was a 'tree to be desired to make one wise.' So, in a moment of weakness, and of folly and presumption, 'she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.'

How weak, you will say, was Adam thus easily to yield to a woman's temptations! But it shows

* Prov. ix. 17.

how a man can be led by a woman, a husband by a wife : and therefore, how careful women and wives ought to be to use their power rightly.

Had Eve for one moment realised the awful results of this one act of disobedience, she would, we feel sure, have turned a deaf ear to the wiles of the Serpent, and refused to listen to Satan's temptations. But now, 'the eyes of them both were opened,' and the first wisdom and knowledge which dawned upon them was this, 'they knew that they were naked.' Sorrow and sadness must always follow sin, and to our first parents they came but too quickly. How soon were they both changed in nature and in feelings !

The first mournful change in them was, that when hearing the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, shame and terror filled their hearts, and they hid themselves among the trees of the garden. But 'whither shall I go then from Thy presence?' must have been their exclamation in that hour of fear and dread, when they heard the voice of God solemnly asking, 'Adam, where art thou ?'

Sin, and sin only, made him tremble at that voice, which once he had loved to hear, and led him to make that cowardly, untruthful answer to his Maker, 'I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked : and I hid myself.'

In this meeting with his God, we see that he

had now lost the Divine image, in which he had been created. God replies, ‘Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?’ Mark the ingratitude, and the cowardice of Adam in his answer to this question: ‘The woman *whom Thou gavest to be with me*, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.’ Thus he endeavours to cast all the blame of his fall upon his Maker, and upon the wife whom God had created to be a help-meet for him. ‘Then the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done?’ And Eve, perhaps with more justice, but with the same mean desire to shift the blame of her own sin on others, said, it was the Serpent’s fault, ‘The Serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.’

Then was heard in Eden that ‘terrible voice of the most just judgment’ of God, in the punishment which He pronounced upon the three offenders against Him. The Almighty begins with His curse upon the Serpent, the source of all their sin and misery. It is to be evermore the lowest of all the beasts of the field, ever crawling in the dust, despised and loathed by mankind.

But upon Satan himself, who had taken the form of the serpent, to ruin man, was the great curse passed, ‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his

heel.' This promise received its fulfilment mainly in our Lord Jesus Christ, the chiefest of the 'seed,' or descendants, of the woman. His heel, a part not vital, was bruised by Satan, when His body, His merely human nature, was crucified upon the cross. But He bruised Satan's head, in the first instance, when He rose victoriously from the grave, and 'destroyed him, that had the power of death, even the Devil, and delivered them who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' And He will bruise it, completely and for ever, when He comes at the Last Day.

But it has also a fulfilment in the dislike, contempt, and opposition, with which those who live only for this world, treat all earnest followers of Jesus Christ; in the persecution with which those 'born after the flesh,' will to the end of time 'persecute them born after the Spirit.' But, thanks be to God, 'greater is He that is for us, than he which is against us.' Christ giveth us the victory over sin and Satan.

Now to the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception: in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.' Sorrow follows, for both our guilty parents, one was to rule, the other to serve, throughout all future ages. 'Man that is born of a woman is full of trouble.* Affliction, suffering, death, was now

* Job, xiv. 1.

to be the portion of both. To the woman alone a greater trial was allotted in that she was ‘first in the transgression.’

Then to Adam, God spake lastly, ‘Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it ; cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life ; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee ; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground : for out of it wast thou taken ; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’

The first rebuke, you will observe, was in having listened to Eve’s temptations, to which Adam ought to have turned a deaf ear. Then followed the curse upon the ground. It is true that active work is a blessing to us all, in whatever grade of life God has been pleased to place us—it was part of the employment of Paradise—and to all, and more especially those who do their work for Him, the curse becomes a blessing. At the same time, what we now call labour is a part of the curse here pronounced, for it brings with it fatigue, weariness, exhaustion to the body.

How new must have been these feelings to Adam and Eve ! Together they must ever henceforth tread a rough and thorny path. The thorns, thistles, and weeds growing everywhere, and which required Adam’s constant digging and care to pre-

vent their overrunning the soil altogether, being a type of the temptations, sorrows, and cares, which beset their daily life.

We are next told, that 'the Lord God did make them coats of skins, and clothed them.' How great His goodness, loving-kindness, and condescension! It is believed, dear friends, that these coats were made of the skins of animals killed to be sacrificed unto God. Because at this time men lived on the herbs of the field, and did not kill animals for food. Even as early as this, God would teach mankind the great truth that 'without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.' Hence blood must be poured out, as a type of the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth from all sin. Sacrifices must be offered as a pattern of that great sacrifice, which was in after ages to be offered up for all sinners, in Jesus the 'Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world.'

'The Lord God sent Adam forth from the Garden of Eden.' In these few simple words, how much misery is expressed! What a mournful day must that have been to them, when trembling, shrinking, weeping, they were driven out of Paradise for ever, and saw the Cherubim with a flaming sword, which turned every way, placed at the gate, as it were, to bar the entrance, and prevent their ever again seeing the spot where they had so terribly fallen from grace. And some persons

think that these Cherubims were also placed to keep and preserve the way of the Tree of Life, to show that the way of salvation was still open. Also that God's Presence was here shown forth, just as in after years it was between the Cherubim, in the Jewish Tabernacle and Temple, and that here Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, went to worship before the Lord.

And here, dear friends, we must leave our miserable first parents for a while to their wretchedness and sadness, only rejoicing, that in their woe the way of salvation was pointed out to them, and that while the gates of the earthly Paradise were for ever closed to them, Christ opened the 'kingdom of Heaven to all believers,' from their time until this day. And if the way to Heaven was open to Adam and Eve, is it less so now that Jesus has died and risen again? Nay, 'Whosoever cometh unto Him He will in no wise cast out.' Hear His own sweet words thus speaking, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' But do not forget the next words, 'Take my yoke upon you.' It is through giving up ourselves to obey Him, that we obtain this rest. Without humble and hearty obedience to His will—doing only what He likes—we cannot have that 'rest.'

Let us each one ask herself to-day these solemn questions: Have I come to Jesus,—in repentance for my sins, for pardon and for peace?

Is the Saviour *my* Saviour? Do I earnestly desire to turn to Him, with all my heart, not keeping anything back? And let me assure you each one, that never did a true penitent go to Christ in vain. No, He will graciously receive you and pardon you, will give you a new heart, and changed desires and wishes, will help you to be holy, will bless you now, and keep you for ever.

in
thr
no
gra
ple
Ct

an
Lc
wa
gr
Ca
th
hi
re
ar
ve
ss

EVE THE FALLEN.

COLLECT.

O God, the strength of all them that put their trust in Thee, mercifully accept our prayers ; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace, that in keeping of Thy commandments we may please Thee, both in will and deed ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Gen. iv. 1-16.

And Adam knew Eve his wife ; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering : but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth ? and why is thy

countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? And He said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand. When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from Thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

WE left Adam and Eve, you will all remember, in sadness, driven out of the Garden of Eden to toil for their daily bread. I must now ask you to think of Eve as a mother, the first mother, 'the mother of all living.'

Try, dear friends, for one moment to imagine all that she must have gone through in mind and in body, both beforehand and at the birth of her firstborn babe, ere she had the joy of motherhood.

From our beloved Queen upon her throne down to the very humblest peasant in the lowliest, poorest cottage in her dominions, all who have the blessing of children must know the sufferings of Eve's fall, and the punishment which came through that fall. All must endure, to some degree, the perils and the pains of Nature's worst trial.

But Eve had more to endure than any woman could have had to bear since her time. She was alone in her suffering, inasmuch as no kind woman's voice was near to cheer and to aid her, to help her to bear hopefully the new and alarming anguish. No kind doctor's ever-welcome words, assuring her that all would be well with her speedily. No friendly neighbour to take, at its entrance into life, the little, helpless babe in her great weakness and exhaustion, to clothe it and place it gently on the thankful, happy mother's arm, to nestle at her side.

Adam was her only stay in this trying hour ; and however kind and willing he might be, he could not have been of all the assistance to her which she so sorely needed. But doubtless, when folding in her fond, maternal embrace, her first-born treasure, her darling son, she 'remembered'

no more the anguish, for joy that a man was born into the world.'

Mercifully, we shall all agree, was the future of that child hidden from her knowledge, or his birth could not have brought to her or to his father one ray of joy, or hope, or pleasure. As it was, she felt and she acknowledged her little one to be a gift to her from God Himself, calling him 'Cain,' which means 'gotten,' and said, 'I have gotten a man from the Lord.' Many think that she hoped that this first 'seed of the woman' would be the Deliverer promised by God to bruise Satan, the Serpent's head. If so, how tenfold greater was her disappointment!

She received this immortal being as David afterwards taught us we ought all to receive our children, as an 'heritage and gift that cometh from the Lord.'

We, dear friends, who are mothers, know full well the sweet, yet holy, solemn joys of this first gift of an undying soul to train for God and for eternity; and what a halo of love seemed to surround our firstborn babe, as we pressed it to our bosom in a rapture of delight, and natural pride and thankfulness.

After a while, a second son was born to Adam and Eve, and the parents named him 'Abel,' which means 'vanity.'

They had been disappointed that Cain was not the Deliverer for whom they had hoped; and

perhaps, also, he already showed signs of an evil disposition. ('Evil is bound up in the heart of a child.') So in bitterness of soul they said all was vanity, and made a name for their child, a name to speak their thoughts.

The boys appear from their childhood to have been of very different characters. Though probably both were trained and brought up alike, their dispositions were a total contrast to one another.

In process of time, when grown into men, both the brothers brought offerings to God of divers kinds. Cain approached his Maker with fruits of the ground. This, to begin with, was disobedience to God's command, which seems to have been given from the first; to come before Him with the blood of a Sacrifice.

Thus Cain showed that he did not feel himself to be a sinner needing 'One' to die in his stead, or, feeling himself separated from God by sin, needing an atonement, or reconciliation with God. Further, Cain seems to have cared little about the matter, and to have offered just what came to hand, not the best that he had, as Abel offered to his God.

Abel brought, as he was desired to bring, of his flock; and he brought the finest and the best of it; 'the firstlings of it, and of the fat thereof;' thus in his offering confessing his guilt as a sinner before God, and showing his faith in the promised salvation, and his deep thankfulness for it; for without

the shedding of blood Abel well knew there could be no remission of sins.

'By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts : and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*

God had respect unto Abel's offering,† which was a type of the 'Lamb slain from the foundation of the world ;' but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

'And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth ? and why is thy countenance fallen ? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted ? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.'

How kind, how gracious of God thus to talk with Cain ! He knew all the envy, hatred, jealousy, and malice which were in his heart, yet He strove with him, telling him that he, Cain, might still have his rights as the elder brother, that Abel might be subject to him. 'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted ?' He might even now return to the right way, and offer to God a sin-offering, an acceptable sacrifice.

But Cain turned a deaf ear to the Almighty's kind and pleading voice.

* Heb. xi. 4.

† Ps. xx. 3.

'And Cain talked with Abel his brother : and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother ? And he said, I know not : Am I my brother's keeper ? And he said, What hast thou done ? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.'

They went out together into the field, where, probably, in happier childhood they had often played together. What passed there Holy Scripture does not tell us, until we read those awful words : 'And Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.' St. John, in his First Epistle, asks, 'And wherefore slew he him ? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.'

Here we have the account of Cain's fearfulness in, in slaying his own, his only brother. Oh, what a family was now that of the once happy Adam and Eve !

To a tender mother's loving heart, what is under any circumstances more distressing than the death of a beloved child ? We who have known this bitter grief can recall the agony of looking upon the dear face in the stillness of death ; the bright eye closed to us ; the familiar voice hushed for ever ; and we can remember, too, the feeling, that never more in this world could we know an hour's happiness or gladness of heart, without

the dear one, now gone forth from us never to return.

But add to Nature's sorrow the agony of losing one child by the cruel hand of a brother's wrath, and a brother's hatred. And think of the woe and unutterable grief of these parents in beholding the piteous, gentle face of their beloved Abel looking upward from the ground, where in death he had been laid by his brother's anger, envy, and jealousy.

Here was the first murderer, and this was indeed an awful first death for our parents to have beheld,—a child so dear, destroyed by a brother's own hand. How terrible, how fearful, seemed their curse! Only Cain left to them now, and he a fratricide!

Oh, poor Adam and Eve! truly we may exclaim, 'their sorrows were multiplied.' Never was a sadder story written than that of the first Mother with her various griefs and trials.

We may reasonably hope and believe that these bereaved parents sorrowed not as 'those without hope;' but as their Abel had died in the faith, and in doing his duty to God, 'looking unto Jesus,' who was one day to come to be the Saviour of the world, they could also look for the 'Resurrection of the Dead, and the life of the world to come.'

Dear friends, oftentimes when our little ones are struck down by illness, in pouring out our agonised cry to God to spare to us our cherished child, let

us never forget to add to our prayer, 'If it be Thy will.' For how much more blessed is it for that child to be taken early to the bosom of the Saviour, and to be folded among His lambs above, than for it to live, if it is to prove a Cain hereafter, a curse, and not a blessing, to its parents and family.

To many the sin of Adam and of Eve may seem but a 'little sin,' a trifling offence. In the eyes of Him who cannot look upon sin it was so great, that the consequences of that one act of disobedience have lasted from that day to this hour.

What lamentations and woe must have been heard in their now desolate home! How full of bitter sorrow that poor mother's heart! How can they have first received and spoken to Cain, when he came in from his deadly deed!

As soon as Cain had killed Abel, we hear that 'the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel, thy brother?' He answered God with a direct falsehood, and in a spirit of the basest selfishness, 'I know not, am I my brother's keeper?' So one sin leads to others.

What a cold, heartless manner he put on! How dared Cain thus speak to his offended God? Was he not his brother's keeper? Ought not the elder born to have protected, guided, cared for, the younger? We may say with truth, that in every relation, whether as parents, brothers, sisters, mas-

ters, and servants, we have all of us duties to perform for one another in life, which we can never neglect without sin against God.

As soon as Cain had made this insolent answer to God's question, the Almighty pronounced on him the following fearful sentence : 'And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand ; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength ; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.' To which Cain cried out, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.' Indeed, it was very heavy, but 'shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?'

He, who a few minutes before, defied his Maker, was now a miserable being, crying for mercy and for relief from his *punishment*, for which alone he was in deepest anguish. We hear not of his weeping for his *sin*.

But he said, 'Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth ; and from thy face shall I be hid ; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth ; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.'

So you see his dreadful punishment was to endure for a lifetime, for he was not to be killed.

God, ever merciful, gave him time for repentance.

We are told that 'Cain was a tiller of the ground,' and we know that the 'earth had yielded her increase' before his sin, for he brought of the fruit of the ground for an offering. Now he was to labour, and toil, and dig, and work : but though he might sow and plant, he should not reap, or eat any fruit thereof. But this was not the worst part of his punishment.

Cain laments to God, 'From Thy face shall I be hid.' We are sure that Cain did not love God, or wish to commune with Him. And yet he is wretched at the hiding of God's face from him.

Mark this well, my dear friends, for this will be the bitterest portion of the eternal punishment of those who have refused to serve God in this time of His love and mercy. They will hear that fearful sentence of banishment from His presence for ever, 'Depart from *me*, ye cursed ;' while to the righteous the greatest happiness will consist in being with God. 'In Thy presence is fulness of joy.'

We are not told of what nature was the mark which God put upon Cain, but he was branded with some token which would make him different in appearance from any other living person. He was sent forth, as a fugitive and a vagabond, to wander up and down the earth, and he dwelt

in the land of Nod, which means, wandering, or perhaps banishment, in the east of Eden, where he married.

Thus were Adam and Eve 'deprived of both their sons in one day.' We learn that other children were afterwards born to them, one of whom Eve named Seth, that is, 'appointed,' for 'God,' said she, 'hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel whom Cain slew.' But we read that Adam 'begat this son in his own likeness after his image.' You will observe that Seth was not created, as his father Adam was, 'in the image of God,' but in his father's own sinful likeness. What a change, since the days when, looking upon all He had created, God pronounced His creatures to be 'very good.'

And now, we have much to learn from this history of our first mother's temptation and fall. Let us glance through the chief lessons to be drawn from it, and think over and meditate upon them with prayer in our homes, my dear friends.

First, God hates sin, and 'will by no means clear the guilty,' but that to the true penitent 'there is forgiveness with Him.'

Then there is but one way of obtaining salvation, even by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, shed not only for all men, but for every man, every single person of every nation and clime under

heaven ; with this blood our souls must be washed from sin and made pure and spotless. • Thus there is forgiveness through Christ for every penitent who turns to Him.

We are also taught that we must all die, and return to the dust, of which we are made—‘Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ;’ but we know also that Jesus has said, ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life :’ ‘Whosoever believeth in Me shall never die ;’ that is, shall ‘not die eternally.’

We also learn that although ‘Satan as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour,’ yet ‘greater is He that is for us, than he which is against us.’* And that ‘if we resist the devil, he will flee from us.’ While we are here below, we shall ever be beset with temptations, both from within and from without; but our God, if we truly seek Him, will ‘deliver us from evil.’

We also are taught that we must never hearken to the wiles, even of those dearest to us, if they would lead us to sin, that is, to disobey God’s ‘holy will and commandments ;’ or, in other words, to do what He does not like. We must simply ‘believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we shall be saved ;’ taking care to show our belief by our conduct,—with this we may be content, and need not desire to have knowledge beyond what God has given to us in His blessed word.

Another important lesson we are all here

* 1 John, ii. 13 ; iv. 4.

taught, is to receive our babes as ‘gifts from God,’ and to train them up for His service.

To this end, we must pray *for* them, and *with* them, setting them an example by having Family Prayer daily in our homes. We must ask for them, and teach them to ask for themselves, that God, for Christ’s sake, would give them His Holy Spirit.

Then we must teach them to live as they pray, in brotherly love, subduing, in the power of that Holy Spirit for which they have prayed, all unholy tempers and angry passions; point to them the words of Holy Scripture, ‘Little children, love one another, for love is of God;’ ‘Behold how good and how joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.’

What sight is more beautiful than that of a Christian father and mother, united in the holy bonds of heaven-born love, leading their little ones to Jesus, teaching them early to seek their Saviour, bending their knees with them in prayer at His mercy-seat, reverently joining with them in the services of His Church on earth, teaching them to love His holy Day, to love to read His Word which is ‘able to make them wise unto salvation,’ by loving that Day and that Word themselves, and showing their children, that they themselves know and feel the value of the best of Days and the best of Books. For, believe me, in dealing with our children, ‘one ounce of example is worth an hundredweight of precept.’

This, indeed, is a foretaste of that home beyond the grave, where we all hope to be reunited at God's right hand for evermore, 'in glory everlasting.' Is this a faithful picture, my dear sisters, of our own homes?

SARAH, THE MOTHER OF GOD'S CHOSEN RACE.

COLLECT.

O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, bless these Thy servants, and sow the seed of eternal life in their hearts ; that whatsoever in Thy holy Word they shall profitably learn, they may in deed fulfil the same. Look, O Lord, mercifully upon them from heaven, and bless them. And as Thou didst send Thy blessing upon Abraham and Sarah, to their great comfort, so vouchsafe to send Thy blessing upon these Thy servants ; that they obeying Thy will, and alway being in safety under Thy protection, may abide in Thy love unto their lives' end ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Genesis, xii. 1-9.

Now the Lord (had) said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great ; and thou shalt be a blessing :

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee : and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

FOR our next meditation, my dear friends, I have chosen 'Sarah' as being honoured to be the mother of the chosen race of God, for from her, Jesus Christ, the Deliverer, the Saviour of the world, was descended.

You all know that her husband's name was 'Abraham,' and that in the Bible he was called the 'Father of the faithful,' and the 'Friend of God.' 'What an honour for him!' you will exclaim. And so it was, indeed. And now we will consider how God thus favoured Abraham above other men.

He was the son of Terah, who, we are told, was an idolater, that is, he worshipped other gods than the one only true God.* Men around him also worshipped the sun, moon, and stars, though they were only created by God to give them light and warmth, and intended to help them, to look 'from Nature up to Nature's God,' and not to lead them to worship the creature instead of the Creator.

We are told that Terah was one hundred and thirty years old when Abram was born to him.

After awhile the latter married Sarai, and then

* Josh. xxiv. 2, 3.

came from God that most wonderful call, ‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.’

Thus was he called to come forth out of a land of idolaters, and to leave his country, the place of his birth. This was of itself a sore trial; for who does not love their native land, and cling to the place where their childhood was spent? Abram was also to leave his kindred—a still more bitter sorrow—the relations whom he loved and who loved him; the dear companions of his youth, his ‘own familiar friends,’ were all to be left behind him.

Lastly, he was to remove from his ‘father’s house.’

This was the crowning point of his trial, leaving his home, his boyhood’s home; for although he was not blessed with the true blessing of a pious father, yet we may believe that he loved him truly, and the home which had sheltered him also was very dear to his heart.

If Abram obeyed the call, God’s promise to him was, ‘I will make of thee a great nation.’ One of the greatest honours among the Jewish people was to be considered as the head of a large family. Numerous children were always desired by them. ‘Be thou the mother of thousands of millions’ was the wish of friends to Rebekah, in Gen. xxiv.

60. The Easterns love to have children born to them, and especially sons, and their strong love for them is oftentimes an example to us.

'I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth,'* also 'as the stars of heaven,' only to be counted or numbered by God Himself, which is even a more glorious, and a larger promise.

That God did not fail to fulfil this promise we all well know, in the reign of Solomon.† But even before that time, Balaam, when prophesying of the happiness of the children of Israel, cried, 'Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?' showing that they were innumerable, except to God, 'by whom the very hairs of our head are all numbered.'

But the last of the blessings promised to Abram by God, was the highest and the holiest: 'In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.'

From Abram and Sarai, were God's chosen people Israel to come; and from them the Messiah, the 'Saviour of the world,' was to spring.

To be the chosen people of the King of Kings was of itself a great privilege; but that from them Christ was to be descended, was an honour above all honours, and desired and coveted by every Jewish maiden, from Eve herself, to the Virgin Mother of our Saviour.

Then, further, he was to go to a land strange

* Gen. xiii. 16.

† 1 Kings, iv. 20.

to him altogether, ‘unto a land that I will show thee.’

The Apostle Paul tells how, ‘By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed ; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.’

Abraham knew the voice that called him was the voice of God, the Lord of heaven and earth ; so without asking any questions, or expressing any doubts or fears, he simply obeyed God’s bidding, and journeyed to the promised land ; ‘into the land of Canaan he came.’ He had probably been brought to the knowledge of the true God long before this time ; and his conversion ‘from darkness unto light’ is one of the most wonderful in the Scriptures. Thus his love for the true God had already made him obedient to the Divine commands.

You must, my dear friends, all clearly understand that Abraham had from God two distinct calls.

The first came to him when ‘in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran’ (or Haran), when he had to give up his country and kindred.* The second, that mentioned in Genesis, xii., given to him in Haran after the death of his father, demanding of him the separation from his father’s house, which involved an entire separation from all his early, happy ties.

* Acts, vii. 2.

I want you now particularly to notice that we do not hear one word of Sarai's objecting to this sudden flight. No ; she went with Abram three hundred miles away, through dreary, hot, and dusty deserts, across rivers, on long and fatiguing journeys. And we are not told that one word of murmuring from her lips ever added to Abram's trial. 'Nothing doubting,' they went forth together.

No loving, true, Christian wife will ever hinder her husband from 'going forth' wherever duty calls him, even when she longs to remain quietly where she is living, perhaps, in ease and comfort, to go forward into new and strange scenes and places, untried and unknown to her. She should ever say and feel as Ruth, the Moabitess, said and felt afterwards, 'Where thou goest I will go ; . . . thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.' So Abram set out, bringing Terah, his father, with him. God saw his willingness to obey ; and so, while still commanding him to leave his country and his kindred, probably on account of the danger to his religion from the bad company of idolaters, spared him, for the present, the further trial of leaving 'his father's house.' Accordingly, instead of going at once to Canaan, they stop short at Haran.

Haran, or Charran, was a town in Mesopotamia. The present town is a miserable place on a dreary, wide, sandy plain, where a few poor Arabs live.

We do not know for how long a time they remained in Haran, but from the following verse they must have stayed there for many years, as we are told, ‘And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran ; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan ; and into the land of Canaan they came.’

There Terah died, and there God renewed the call to Abram—and Sarai (for we must believe that she shared in this dutiful act of obedience),—who then started on their long journey together.*

Soon afterwards Lot parted from his uncle, and Abram was now left alone with Sarai in this new strange land ; ‘alone yet not alone,’ for his God was ever near to cheer him in his lonely hours, and his faithful Sarai was his companion and his comfort.

Sarai’s was no singular case, we are thankful to say. In every age, and in every clime, and in every rank of life, women have been, and are still, found ready to go with their husbands, to give up their country, their friends, their homes, when duty calls them forth ; to go even with cheerfulness and ready obedience to God’s call, and to work for Him in distant lands, with a willing, loving service.

Abram and Sarai now came and dwelt in the

* Heb. xi. 8.

plains of Mamre, and pitched their tent near to Hebron. St. Paul particularly mentions this as a proof of their faith, ‘dwelling in tabernacles or tents.’ They showed that they felt themselves to be but ‘strangers and pilgrims upon earth.’

Many of you have seen tents pitched about this pretty country, so can somewhat picture an Arab tent such as I have often slept in for months together.

The Arab tents in Eastern countries are made ordinarily of black goat’s hair, and are generally large and roomy, divided into three portions : one for the men, one part for women and children, and the third part for the cattle and servants at night. The shape and size vary very much according to the number of the travellers and their rank. Sometimes those of the higher class are very pretty, being made of crimson, blue, and yellow silk in stripes. Balaam thus described an encampment : ‘How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob ! and thy tabernacles, O Israel !’ The goat’s hair is so thick and strong that it will keep off the heaviest rains, as I have often found.

This mode of travelling is very pleasant and independent, as you can pitch your tent where you please, and change your place as you like. The tent-pegs are soon taken up, when you desire to remove, and then it may be truly said, ‘The place thereof knoweth it no more.’ A good emblem of our fleeting, changing lives, dear

friends ! Hezekiah in his sickness cried out, 'Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent.'

Time went on, and happy as Abram and Sarai were in their home, they were still childless. The great desire of Sarai's heart was to have a son, and God had promised to send a son to her, only she must wait His time. But she began to doubt and to be unbelieving, whether, after all, she was to be the mother of God's chosen race.

Accordingly, after several years, she thought she would help to carry out God's will by persuading Abram to take to himself a second wife, and she chose for him her own Egyptian maid, Hagar.

In Eastern nations kings and great men have many wives, and this produces much misery, envying, and jealousy. How different is our state in this highly-favoured England. In our beautiful marriage-service both the husband, and the wife, take upon themselves this solemn vow and promise that, 'forsaking all others, they will keep only unto him or her, so long as they both shall live.'

Sarai did very wrongly in thus attempting to hasten God's plans for her ; and, as Abram yielded to her, much sorrow and misery to them followed.

Hagar despised Sarai, when she found she herself was about to become a mother ; and Sarai, being of a warm temper, and feeling, perhaps,

somewhat jealous, could not bear this, and dealt hardly with Hagar, who 'fled from the presence of her mistress.' But God sent her back to Sarai; thus teaching us that, while a mistress should ever be forbearing and forgiving, a servant's first duty is obedience.

For many years we do not hear further of Hagar, or of her son Ishmael.

God now changed Abram's name from 'Abram,' which means 'a high father,' to 'Abraham,' which means 'the father of a multitude of nations.' Also God said, that Sarai's name should no longer be Sarai, but 'Sarah,' which means 'princess,' at the same time ordering the solemn rite of Circumcision. We may then call their new names of 'Abraham' and 'Sarah,' their Baptismal names.

'And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent-door in the heat of the day; and he lift up his eyes, and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent-door, and bowed himself toward the ground.*

After journeying for several years, Abraham and Sarah once more settled down quietly together in the plains of Mamre. They were rich in this world's goods; but, better far, were rich in faith. But, rich as they were, behold how simply they

* Gen. xviii. 1-19.

lived! Abraham 'was sitting in the door of the tent, in the heat of the day' (often have I witnessed just such a scene in Palestine), resting himself peacefully at the entrance to the tent, which was open to let in air and light. Suddenly, three men appeared; and when Abraham saw them, he ran to meet them, and bowing himself down to the ground, as was the Eastern custom, he invited them to return with him to his tent, and to rest under the shade of the trees which were close to it, and to refresh themselves.

These trees, called 'terebinth,' were very fine and large, very much like our oaks. One of them, to this day a magnificent tree, is called, and is well known everywhere, as 'Abraham's Oak.' It is a tall, stately tree, of very great age, with thick foliage, and its form is at once graceful and magnificent. It measures twenty-three feet round the trunk; and when at Mamre, we sat down, side by side upon one of the branches which ran along the ground, seventeen persons in number.

You will all notice the great respect and courtesy with which Abraham received his unknown guests. What a beautiful picture of Oriental manners we have here placed before us! Abraham was quite ignorant of the rank of his visitors, but 'ran out to meet them' with true politeness and respect, as a real gentleman would do.

'And he bowed himself towards the ground.'

Not only was Abraham eager to show kindness, but also he was, as every true Christian ought to be, polite and courteous.

Although so rich in all things, that of a certainty he had many servants, he himself offers to get water to wash their tired, heated feet.

This is ever in those sultry climates, (where they wore sandals, not shoes,) the first act of hospitality shown to a traveller, and is most refreshing. He thus showed us that no true gentleman is ever demeaned by any honest work, however humble ; and that no honest work, however humble, prevents a man from being a true gentleman.

But we, dear friends, have a still higher and far greater instance of One, who, though their Lord and Master, did more lowly kindnesses than Abraham here performed for his guests, for He Himself washed His disciples' feet.* At the feet of Jesus we must all learn the truest humility. The weary travellers thankfully accepted his offers of rest and food. You observe, Abraham was also generous. 'He ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf, tender and good, and took butter and milk, and the calf which Sarah had dressed, and set it before them.'

No doubt there were cushions and carpets upon the ground, on which they were seated in

* John, xiii. 6-14.

the tent, and a low table in the middle of it, upon which the food was placed.

Sarah was all this time busy in baking 'cakes upon the hearth' for them. She was not above making herself useful, even with her own hands doing the work of a servant. She thus showed herself to be a true gentlewoman.

It is not finery and idleness, dear friends, that makes the true gentlewoman, but a life of Christian usefulness. I once knew a person who called herself a lady, who said, in a very haughty tone, that 'her hands had never even touched flour,' proving herself, by that speech alone, to be no true lady. Our beloved Queen's own children in our day are very differently trained, and are taught to do many things that are useful, simple, and homely.

While Sarah was thus busy preparing the meat, the angels renewed to Abraham the promise which he had so often heard before, that his wife should have a son.

When Sarah was young and very beautiful, as the Bible tells us, 'fair to look upon,' she had, we learn, thought very much and joyfully of this promise; but now that she was sixty-five years old, she had almost forgotten it, and seldom thought of it at all. When, therefore, she heard the words of the angel through the tent-door, we are told 'Sarah laughed within herself,' and doubted God's power and faithfulness.

But the speaker was One 'to whom all hearts are open.' He knew Sarah's thoughts, as two thousand years after He knew the thoughts of malicious Pharisees and of vain disciples ; and He said, 'Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I have a child that am old ? Is anything too hard for the Lord ?' Thus, Sarah, one of our great examples of faith, fell into distrust of God.

We always fail in those points where we think ourselves the safest. If we be inclined to say, 'Into whatever sin I may fall I should never be tempted to do this or that,' we may rest assured that we are very likely to go astray in that very direction.

Further, Sarah told a direct falsehood ; for she denied, and said, 'I laughed not.' And if so good a woman, as Sarah doubtless was, could so easily be surprised by sudden temptation to be untruthful, how much more carefully must we watch against this sin ! In God's sight there is no sin worse than a lie. There is no sin more easy to commit. Guard against it, for your own sakes. You know full well the liar's end. Guard against it, for your children's sake. Woeful is the lot of that mother, whose children learn from her example not to tell ever the strictest truth !

Sarah was put to shame before her husband and before the angels ; but this will be as nothing

to the 'shame and everlasting contempt' which will await the liar and deceiver before that same Angel, when seated on His judgment-seat at the last great day. God is a God of truth. And no greater proof of this can be found than in the truthfulness of His Word, which tells the whole truth about even the best of men and women.

But the unbelief which Sarah at first showed did not 'make the promise without effect.' Sarah repented after her reproof. She sought and obtained from God the gift of 'faith,' and in His time at length became 'a joyful mother.'

And now she and Abraham rejoiced together over the fulfilment of God's plighted word, in the child of their old age.* For not only had she the wonted gladness of a true mother's heart, 'when a man is born into the world,' but this babe was no common gift, for from him was to be descended the Saviour of our world. Well might Sarah then in glad accents press to her fond heart her Isaac, and exclaim, 'In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'

He was called 'Isaac,' or laughter,† as God had commanded, doubtless in remembrance of his father's laugh of trustful joy on hearing the promise, which he entirely believed. But, in Sarah's case the name would serve another purpose. While it reminded Abraham of his faith, it

* Heb. xi. 11.

† Gen. xxii. 19.

would also remind Sarah of her unbelief, and tend to keep her watchful and humble in her walk with God. Nor yet should the name only remind her of her weakness ; it should also remind her of her God's undeserved mercy and love. So when they gave him his name, she said, 'God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.' (See Gen. xxii. 6.)

At the end of the eighth day Isaac was circumcised. In the first days of their great joy these parents did not forget this important duty of bringing their babe to God in His own solemn ordinance. From this, we, dear friends, must learn, that we cannot bring our little ones too early to Jesus in the Holy Sacrament of Baptism. He is a Saviour who loves children well, and will give them His blessing, and graciously said for our endless comfort as mothers, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

Now we should all imagine this patriarchal home must know perfect happiness ; peace and contentment must reign there. But alas ! it was not so. There is no perfect happiness on this side of the grave. Ever since the first sin was committed, 'All have sinned' in all ages, and evil tempers, jealousies, unholy feelings, spoil the homes of but too many who are even Christians ! With the followers of Jesus it is a constant fight, a war-

fare in our evil hearts, against sin. And even the godly Sarah was not a perfect woman, or free from sin.

Ishmael, now some sixteen years old, was a wild boy, difficult to manage, and like most boys, fond of having his own way.

One day when Isaac was weaned, Abraham and Sarah made a great feast. It was either on this occasion, or perhaps later on, that Sarah saw Ishmael, the son of Hagar, mocking her own darling son. This she could not endure with meekness, so she called Abraham, and said unto him, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.' Mark the expression 'my son,' as though Isaac were not Abraham's son also.

Abraham, ever so gentle, so kind to her, who had been the loved partner of his joys and sorrows for more than seventy years, yet found it a sore and grievous trial to listen now to Sarah's request. So he did what all good men should do, he laid the matter before the Lord in earnest prayer. And God, who knew His own plans, for both the lads, told him to hearken to the voice of his wife.

Doubtless Sarah had seen in Ishmael's conduct a bad example, which might injure the character of Isaac, who being so much younger, would so

easily be led away by his elder brother. In this idea we are confirmed by the words of St. Paul, who says, speaking of Ishmael mocking Isaac, ‘ He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit.’

We may gather from these words, that Ishmael teased and vexed Isaac, and laughed at him, perhaps because the little boy would pray to his father’s God, or would not join him in some play or amusement, which Isaac knew to be wrong. We fear that Hagar, Ishmael’s mother, had brought her son up badly, and now encouraged him in this bad and unkind behaviour to his younger brother.

Mark this, that Abraham’s whole life was one course of obedience and self-denial. He sent Hagar, and his beloved son Ishmael forth ‘ early in the morning.’ With the rising sun he obeyed God’s counsels. ‘ Delays are dangerous’ is a true saying among us, and doubtless Abraham felt the truth of this even in his times.

Hagar took only bread and water with her and ‘ the child,’ and when this small supply was spent, they must both have perished miserably in the wilderness but for God’s goodness. Hagar, we are touchingly told, ‘ cast the child hungry and thirsty under one of the shrubs, and went a good way off, for she said, Let me not see the death of the child.’

'And God heard the voice of the lad.'

So you see Ishmael had learnt to pray, and to cry unto the Lord in his distress during the fourteen years he had lived in the tents of his godly father Abraham. Oh, that every little child could thus be taught early the value of heartfelt prayer !

The angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said, 'What aileth thee, Hagar, fear not!' And then God promised to make Ishmael a great nation, and opened her eyes, and showed unto her a well of water, and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. We often find that sorrow and trouble blind our eyes, and we cannot see or benefit by the comfort and consolation which is within our reach.

We now read of Abraham's greatest trial of faith, obedience, and love to his God.

'And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went

unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.'

Abraham tenderly loved Isaac, the child of his old age, the child of promise, but better than his son he loved his God. For when God 'did tempt Abraham,' or made a trial of his faith, by commanding him to slay his son, at once he obeyed God, and without hesitation or delay. We are told that he 'rose up early in the morning,' and Isaac, now grown to be a man, being nearly twenty-four years old, went with him. They took with them all things needful for the sacrifice, and reached the place whither God had sent them on the third day.

We must not pause long to think or speak of Abraham's willingness to give up his only and well-beloved son. In this, he was a type of God the Father who gave up His only-begotten Son for us sinners and for our salvation. Nor can we stay to ponder upon Isaac's readiness to give up his life; in which he was a type of Jesus who willingly laid down His life for us.

I can only stay to tell you, in the words of Holy Scripture, how at the moment, when Abraham had the knife in his hand, ready to deal the fatal blow, a voice sounded from heaven, and stayed the uplifted weapon, and the Angel of the Lord (the same that had appeared to Abraham in the tent at Mamre) called to him out of heaven and

said, 'Abraham, Abraham : and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him ; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns ; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh : as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen. And the Angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord ; for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son : That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies ; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ; because thou hast obeyed my voice.'

'How joyful must their journey have been, and what happy converse Abraham and Isaac would hold together, as they wended their way back to Sarah and their home.

We are not told by the inspired writer whether Abraham had told Sarah of the object of their journey or not. As he had not told Isaac it is

probable that he had not informed his mother. Perhaps he would not unnecessarily pain the fond, loving mother's heart, feeling assured that God would raise his son to life from the dead. But if Sarah had known all, then she must have richly shared her husband's faith, and helped to strengthen it, and have thus given to us one more good reason to admire, respect, and imitate this 'godly matron.'

And now, my friends, you will say with me, a very happy life had Abraham and Sarah lived together on earth. But 'we must all die,' and the longest life must come to an end. 'Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old, . . . and Sarah died!'

How simply told! but of how much true sorrow do those two words speak to us. After so many blessed hours, spent together in serving God, sharing all each other's duties, labours of love, pleasures, feelings, wishes, they are parted for ever on earth, and in this world can never be reunited!

The first piece of ground which Abraham possessed in the promised land of Canaan was a grave for his beloved Sarah and for himself!* And there he quietly laid to rest that affectionate, devoted wife, that true example of a good Mother, 'in sure and certain hope of the resurrec-

* Gen. xxiii. 15-20.

tion to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ,'—a hope which has been the only true comfort of the mourner, from the first tears, shed by Eve at the death of her Abel, to the last, who shall weep at the open grave to the end of time.

R E B E K A H.

COLLECT.

O Eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life ; Send Thy blessing upon these Thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in Thy Name ; that, as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to Thy laws ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Gen. xxiv. 1-15.

And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age : and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh : and I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell : but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife.

unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land : must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest ? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land ; He shall send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath : only bring not my son thither again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter. And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed ; for all the goods of his master were in his hand : and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water ; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water : and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink ; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also : let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac ; and thereby shall I know that Thou *hast showed* kindness unto my master. And it came to

pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder.

THE chapter, part of which I have just read to you, contains one of the most interesting events in the life of Abraham. He was old now, and as every true Christian ought to do, he wished to settle everything in his family matters before he was taken to his rest above. Before his death, he desired to see his loved son Isaac married to a wife who feared God, and not to a Canaanite, who would have been an idolater.

Marriages are to this day in all parts of the East arranged by the parents, and not by the young people themselves, so that they are scarcely ever founded on affection as they ought to be; though we may hope, love oftentimes follows, when the newly married learn more of one another.

It was only in the ancient home of the family, and among his own kindred and relations, that a suitable wife for Isaac could be found. Abraham, being too old and infirm to go himself, called to him his faithful servant, 'the steward of his house,' Eliezer of Damascus, and intrusted to him the difficult and important mission.

Eliezer, the model servant, was ever ready and willing to obey his good, kind master's bidding, and to go wherever he sent him; but he foresaw difficulties in his errand of a grave kind, and inquired

of Abraham, 'Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land.' Abraham assured him thus: 'The Lord God, He shall send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.' He then made his servant take an oath, that he would perform his important errand faithfully.

What a pattern was Eliezer to all servants! so anxious to please his master, to do his duty, and yet not wishing to undertake what he feared he might not be able to perform aright. Then, mark further, dear friends, that Eliezer was a praying servant, he offered up a few words of simple, humble prayer to his heavenly Father, calling Him, 'O Lord God of my master Abraham,' as if he felt his own unworthiness, and came to God as from his master.

Having the care of all Abraham's goods, he takes ten camels. He takes the large number partly because he wished to make an appearance worthy of the rank, riches, and position of his master, but partly also in order to carry with him the numerous and costly marriage presents, and also his provisions for the journey.

How well I can picture the procession starting off for Mesopotamia! Eliezer, taking a respectful farewell of his aged master Abraham, would sally forth on his camel, in richly coloured robes embroidered probably with gold (as the steward of *a great man* would wear), and a girdle of material,



like a shawl wound round his waist four or five times. This 'girdle' is still worn, and one end of it being folded or doubled back is sewn together, and forms a strong purse, very useful, to hold the small piastres or pieces of about twopence, which are universally kept there. There also, in later times, a man carried his ink-bottle and pen-case (if he could write), for in those early days people were proud of being able to write, and always had this ink-horn to show that they were writers.

No Eastern dare appear out of his own house without his 'turban.' The higher the rank of the wearer, the higher the turban, which is sometimes made of white, at others of coloured material, wound round the head many times. Though heavy to carry, this keeps out the heat of the sun effectually. Large caravans or processions like this I am describing to you generally travel, three or four camels abreast, as the beasts are very sociable, and do not go as well when made to follow one another singly. The riders also can talk to one another more pleasantly when side by side. The servants all walk together all day long by the camels of their masters. Thus then they travelled slowly on, for the roads in the East are rough and stony; you will remember that David prayed, 'Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not,' probably alluding to these dangerous paths.

After days of travel,—for Abraham's country

was in the far East, in the plains of Mesopotamia, at the foot of the Armenian mountains, five hundred miles from Palestine,—the caravan reached its journey's end, and came to the city of Nahor, Abraham's brother.

When a stranger in the East wishes to learn the news of the day, he goes and sits on one of the principal wells outside the walls of the city where he may be, in the morning at sunrise, or in the evening at sunset, and he is sure to hear all that there is to be told, from the women who go there to draw water and to enjoy one another's conversation.

I have seen as many as thirty or forty women laden with earthen pitchers, balanced on their heads and shoulders, some old, some young, all looking bright and cheerful, at this place of meeting, now talking, now listening, now drawing the cool, delicious water. A camel generally turns the wheel, and the refreshing stream is brought up in earthen jars, or 'tosses,' as they are called, which empty themselves into a trough. When there deposited, the thirsty horses, camels, and mules drink freely.

There, then, you can imagine Eliezer halting : 'And he made his camels to kneel down without the city, by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water.' And then he prayed to his God, 'I pray Thee send me good speed this day.'

How valuable is this habit of thus beginning

every day with prayer for God's help and guidance. 'Without Me ye can do nothing,' Jesus Himself told His disciples. However small and common, or however great and difficult may be the duty we have to perform, let us go to the feet of Jesus, and lowly bend our knees in prayer to Him, and He will be with us to help, guide, and assist us in all we undertake.

'Before he had done speaking, behold Rebekah came out.' God is a God who hears and answers prayer. He is more willing to hear than we to pray. The faithful servant had asked of God a sign by which he should know who among the maidens he might meet at the well was to be the right one, chosen by God to be the wife of Isaac. God had given him this sign; and at once Eliezer, recognised, by her sweet, courteous, pleasant manner, that the young and lovely Rebekah, 'very fair to look upon,' the daughter of Abraham's brother, and therefore a cousin of Isaac's, was to be the chosen bride.

At once he found her amiable character showing itself. Although he was a complete stranger to her, she ran and gave him to drink out of her pitcher at his request; then, with womanly tact and refined courtesy, addressed him as 'My lord,' and ran again to draw water, not only for Eliezer, but also for his thirsting, wearied camels. She was the very person he had pictured to himself, so beautiful, so graceful, so gracious, so ladylike, he

felt sure at once that she was the wife for his master's son, to be desired and secured.

Surely Rebekah fulfilled the divine injunctions afterwards given to us, 'Be pitiful, be courteous.' Then, too, she was hospitable and kind. Never dreaming of Eliezer's errand she pressed him to go to her house: 'We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in.' Eliezer first put upon her hands two massive golden bracelets, and an earring of half a shekel in weight. The bracelets were worn round the top of the arm in those days in the East, and to this day. I have seen three or four, or even more, set with precious stones, on each arm of women drawing water at the wells. They are very fond of jewellery, and put family property into these articles. The 'earring' of which the Scripture speaks is believed to have been the nose-jewel so commonly worn by Easterns.

At this point Eliezer worshipped the Lord, and returned thanks for His guiding hand which had thus led him, as he felt assured, to the right damsel in his master's family. Then the kind-hearted girl ran home to tell her people of the party about to arrive there in a few minutes. Rebekah's brother, Laban, 'ran out unto the man unto the well,' and seems to have been dazzled at the sight of the beautiful presents received by Rebekah; for we are told by the inspired writer, 'When he saw the earring and bracelets, and when

he heard the words of Rebekah, that he said to Eliezer, 'Come in.' Laban, Eliezer, and Rebekah, then all went to her home together, and they gave Eliezer water to wash his feet, and food for the camels and for himself.

But here, dear friends, you must notice what a true and faithful servant he was, for he said, 'I will not eat until I have told mine errand.' 'Duty first and pleasure afterwards,' was the motto of this servant of God. He then told his name, his position in life: 'I am Abraham's servant;' and related to them all that had befallen him, even to the words of the prayer he had offered to his God, and the wonderful, striking, and gracious answer so swiftly sent. Rebekah's father and brother answered to this simple but most interesting narrative, 'The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken.' They did not hesitate for one moment to give up their beloved daughter, nor did they even consult Rebekah, as they saw that the whole matter was arranged by God, and must therefore be likely—nay, was sure to be, for the happiness of one so very dear to them as Rebekah must have been.

As soon as Eliezer received this cheering answer to his prayers, he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth. He then gave

magnificent gifts of jewels of silver and jewels of gold, not only to the bride-elect, but 'also to her brother, and to her mother precious things.' And now that his business is thus finished, he cannot bear to linger in Mesopotamia. He is full of zeal and energy, and longs to take his newly-found treasure back to his beloved young master, and to show his success. 'Hinder me not,' he exclaims; or, as the blessed Saviour afterwards exclaimed, 'Let Me work the work of Him that sent Me, while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work.*

Rebekah was now betrothed to Jacob, and doubtless saw the guiding hand of her God in this great event of her life so plainly, that she was contented to risk her future and go to be married to a man whom she had never even seen. As he was her cousin, she may, perhaps, have heard of Isaac, for, when they asked her, 'Wilt thou go with this man?' she replied, with firmness and decision, 'I will go.'

In Eastern families the nurse is always a very important person, and is treated with much kindness and affection by all the family circle. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, went with her to her new home; and they all departed together.

Stop one moment to think of the faith and courage of this young girl. What a dream she must have felt the whole events of the last few

* Here read Gen. xxiv. 50-67.

days to have been! How little do we ever know what a day may bring forth! What trust in God she must have felt, to leave her loved father and mother and brother, and the home of her childhood, to go forth with a stranger to her marriage, to a new home, and new duties, and trials, which even in the happiest married life must come to us all, sooner or later.

Now, all this time, how deeply anxious must Isaac have been feeling, the whole happiness of his future life depending upon this journey of Eliezer's! We can well imagine that he was greatly excited and restless, awaiting his return half in eagerness, half in fear, and trembling lest he should bring to his home a wife not acceptable to him.

Isaac, just then, was sad at heart, doubtless, for he had lost his loved and loving mother. His father was a very old man, his friend and faithful servant was gone away, and he felt desolate in his tent, so he went out into the bright green fields at 'eventide to meditate.' Some think that this means he went to pray. We may well hope and believe that this 'child of promise' loved prayer and meditation alone with his God, and that he would feel his only true comfort in pouring out his anxieties into His ear, and earnestly beseeching Him to prosper the journey taken by Eliezer.

We next read that 'Isaac lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold the camels were coming.'

And Rebekah lifted up her eyes ; and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel.'

To 'lift' the eyes is entirely a scriptural expression. We read in the Psalms, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills ;' Abraham and Lot lifted up their eyes, and 'beheld the plain of Jordan.' And the words are very frequently used in the Bible.

With her wonted courtesy Rebekah got off her camel, and with true womanly modesty she put on her veil, which is a large white garment entirely covering the whole person of the Eastern woman out-of-doors, so that they resemble ghosts moving about the country. Thus Isaac could not see the face, until after Eliezer had informed him of all that he had done, when we are touchingly told, 'Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.'

What a sweet and peaceful end to the mission of Eliezer ! How happy must all that family now have felt ! The aged Abraham, contented and thankful that his beloved son was thus blessed in a wife so interesting, whom all could love ; Isaac, in a wife of his youth in whom 'his heart could safely trust,' as he thought ; Rebekah, to be so warmly welcomed and kindly received ; and Eliezer, that he knew God had led him forth and back by the right way, and had found for him a good helpmeet for his honoured master's son.

'And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac,' doubtless wishing, ere he died, to see the young people happy, easy, and comfortable. 'Then Abraham gave up the ghost,' being one hundred and seventy-five years old, and was 'gathered to his people.'

And now, dear friends, you will agree with me that the character of Rebekah in her girlhood was so virtuous, so beautiful, that it is most sad to have to notice, that this character greatly changes in after-life, and is a sad and mournful contrast to the bright promise of her youth, in the numerous faults which appeared suddenly to spring up in her heart and life. Isaac was not a clever or a firm character ; and, perhaps, he yielded too easily to Rebekah. He was forty years of age when he married her, so he ought to have led her rightly. She was evidently strong-minded ; perhaps, he indulged her too much, and thus she became spoilt. Or, perhaps, admiration had injured her, for she had great beauty, which is a snare and a dangerous possession to any woman. The Scripture tells us, 'Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain ; but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised.' Whatever was the cause, we cannot but see a dark shadow cast over her whole married life.

For twenty years Rebekah was without children, as in the case of Sarah, and afterward of Rachel and Hannah. God loves to make His

children wait upon Him patiently. David cried, 'I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me and heard my cry.' 'O rest in the Lord! Wait patiently for Him, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire,' are the words of a sacred song founded upon Scripture truth. In answer to earnest prayer, God sent to Isaac and Rebekah the blessing so long desired, of children.

Two sons—twins—were sent to gladden their hitherto childless home. Doubtless, there was great rejoicing at this event. Previously to their birth, God had told Rebekah, when speaking of the boys who should be born to her, 'The one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger.'

At once the different characters of the two brothers, Esau and Jacob, could be seen. We have all noticed, dear friends, how varied are the dispositions of our children, often forming as great a contrast as the mould of their features, or the colour of their complexions.

Their habits soon made a marked difference in their lives. Esau liked hunting and the sports of the field, and an out-of-door life, while Jacob loved better to be quiet, to remain at home with his beloved mother, whose favourite he knew himself to be.

Isaac was sixty years old when his sons were born to him. He appears to have preferred Esau from a very unworthy reason, which was, that Esau

with his bow and arrow could procure dainties for his appetite. ‘Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison : but Rebekah loved Jacob.’

In Egypt and Syria there is a kind of soft, red bean called lentils, very delicate in flavour, which, the natives commonly cook with onions, making a savoury, nourishing pottage, and this forms a usual meal with them at mid-day.

Here, neither of these brothers appears in a favourable light. Esau returned weary and faint from hunting, and, being exhausted, could not wait to make ‘pottage’ for himself. Seeing Jacob’s was ready for use, he very naturally asked for some of it. A kind brother would have offered it to him unasked, but Jacob seized this tempting opportunity to deprive Esau of his rights as the firstborn son, and of his father’s blessing ; and instead of gladly supplying his brother’s necessities with brotherly kindness, only answered by a request to Esau, ‘Sell me, this day, thy birth-right.’ The privileges of the firstborn were most important ; the chief being that they were the family priests,* also they had a double portion of the inheritance.† Esau, we fear, was thoughtless and careless, and looking only at the pleasure of the moment, found the tempting pottage too delightful, too inviting, to be resisted for the sake of the blessing, which was distant, and of which he seems to have lost sight in his hunger. ‘What profit shall

* Exod. iv. 20.

† Deut. xxi. 17.

this birthright do to me?' he contemptuously exclaimed. 'I am at the point to die.' He meant that, in his occupation of hunting, he was running a daily risk of losing his life.* So he felt but too plainly, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' and sold his birthright to his younger brother for a miserable, perishable mess of potage!

Therefore the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews speaks of him thus: 'Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*'

'There was never any meat, except the forbidden fruit, bought so dear as this broth,' says one of old.

Already we have seen in Rebekah, then, one grave and most serious fault, that of partiality toward her children. Generally, the firstborn is the favoured one, and so he was with Isaac his father; but the mother loved better her younger son.

How precious, how pure, how treasured, is a good and true mother's love; a mother's gentle voice, and bright, fond smile of welcome to our home after absence, her affectionate solicitude and

* Heb. xii. 16, 17.

tenderness, ‘her constant flow of love,’ her kind and anxious advice under difficulty, her counsels—above all, her example. All this can never fade from a child’s memory while life lasts. Happy are the children who can remember such a mother’s love !

How bitter then must it be, on the other hand, to think of a mother who cared not much for her own child, who fostered jealousy and envy by lavishing all her love and affection only upon one brother. How this must alienate natural affection, and produce misery and discord where all should be harmony and peace ! And thus it was in this home and family.

Jacob was not contented with Esau’s word alone, that he would sell to him his birthright, but he bound him with a solemn oath, lest in days to come one who could sell his birthright so carelessly, so thoughtlessly, might treat the whole arrangement as a passing jest.

‘And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son : and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death. Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison ; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat ; that my soul may bless thee before I die. And Rebekah heard when Isaac

spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the Lord before my death. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth: and thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death. And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing. And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them. And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother: and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved. And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son: and she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck: and she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.'

Here we plainly see, dear friends, that even God's true and sincere followers, are liable to be led into temptation and into sin. The plain man, Jacob, practises deceit, and guile, and fraud, while one of the 'holy women who trusted in God,' Rebekah, seduces and leads away her own child into grievous sin and wickedness. At first Jacob appears to have been somewhat wavering, whether to carry out his mother's plans to deceive his aged father or not; but she said to him, 'My son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee;' and he yielded.

Isaac was old, and infirm, and nearly blind. Remember he was now one hundred and thirty-seven years old; and, looking towards the end of his long life, he wished ere he was called hence to give the solemn blessing of a Patriarch to his eldest son. To strengthen himself for this great effort, he begged Esau to go out and make for him savoury meat, to strengthen and support him for the solemn duty which lay before him.

Then Rebekah spake to Jacob, for she knew the value of the blessing, and that God intended it to be for her younger and best beloved son. She desired to secure it for Jacob, herself, instead of quietly leaving all in God's hands; feeling, as she ought to have felt, 'Hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?'

Moreover, she took wicked means to secure it, and 'did evil that good might come.' She sought

to obtain by deceit and dishonesty the blessing, which all the while was certain to have come to Jacob. Jacob indeed scrupled to carry out these sinful plans, not, however, because they were sinful, but fearing to be discovered as a deceiver.

Rebekah planned a number of deceits: a false person is to go in to the old man, pretending to be his own brother, with false venison made of goat's flesh, a feigned name, false excuse, hypocritical pretence of affection to his father and of piety to God, even pretending that he had found the venison so quickly, 'Because the Lord thy God brought it to me.' The only piece of acting in which Jacob could not succeed was in imitating the voice of Esau. For Isaac said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice.' It is a mournful picture to contemplate, the interior of that chamber of death! The aged patriarch dying, almost blind, having lost the keenness of his senses of taste and smell, deceived by her whom he had ever loved and trusted entirely, as well as by one of his own sons.

We can scarcely realise what Jacob must have felt, when receiving his father's solemn and heartfelt blessing under such painful circumstances.

'Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee; cursed be

every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.'

To an Oriental, the blessing 'God give thee of the dew of heaven,' meant a rich and very precious gift. The heat of the sun is so intense, and there is no rain for nine months in the year, so that were it not for very copious dews, the whole land would be barren and dried up. In Canaan the dews were very abundant, for this reason it was called 'the fat land.'* 'As the dew of Hermon, which descended upon the mountains of Sion,' says the Psalmist, so sweet is family unity. Plenty of corn and wine was also a part of the blessing. Palestine is to this day, as I can testify, a land famed for its vineyards and corn, in all varieties and abundance. The temporal blessings here showered upon Jacob were but small in comparison to the great spiritual privileges which he was to enjoy in his seed's seed.

And now arrives the most touching and mournful part of this sad history. No sooner has Jacob left his aged father than Esau returns with his savoury meat, and taking it in to him at once, begs for his blessing. Isaac then asks him in evident emotion, 'Who art thou?' And he said, 'I am thy son, thy firstborn, Esau.' Then the poor old patriarch 'trembled very exceedingly,' from fear and agitation and grief, and 'said, Who? where is he that has taken venison and

* Neh. ix. 25, 35.

brought it to me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.'

Truly has it been said, 'that until we lose our choicest blessings, we never fully value them!' Esau did not esteem his birthright of any importance: now he feels both that, and the paternal blessing he has lost for ever, to be most precious.

'When Esau would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.'

Think of the strange storm now raging in the hearts of Isaac, Esau, and Jacob. Alarm, anger, and sorrow ruled in Isaac's bosom; and fear, mingled with satisfaction at having supplanted his elder brother, in Jacob's; while disappointment, fury, and envy seem to have filled the heart of Esau.

Esau received a blessing from his father perhaps as suitable to his character, or even more so, than spiritual benedictions would have been. Temporal prosperity was given him, and a roving, wild, and free life were to be led by him and his descendants. But Esau the elder was to serve his younger brother, which would be galling to him henceforth.

At once we see the bitter fruits of these wicked frauds of Rebekah and of Jacob. 'Esau hated Jacob,' a second Cain's nature seemed to appear in him. It is scarcely to be wondered at, that *Esau* was provoked at his brother's conduct, for

you must remember, that he made not even any profession of religion. He vowed a deadly revenge against him. ‘The days of mourning for my father are at hand (Esau said in his heart) then will I slay my brother Jacob.’ These words were told to Rebekah. Poor miserable woman! she soon reaped the sad results of her sins of partiality toward her son, and of deceit and guile towards her aged husband, whom she ought only to have honoured and cherished in his declining days. Her wretchedness and her punishment should be a warning to every Christian woman against the sins which she committed. She had lost all peace and happiness in her home! Isaac who had once trusted her implicitly, and loved her fondly, had now lost all confidence in this once cherished wife. Jacob could not live any longer near to his brother, as his life was in daily peril. Rebekah lost the affection of her elder son, whilst her beloved Jacob, her favourite, must leave his home, father, brother, and mother, and go far away into exile. She never saw him again. When he returned after twenty years of banishment he was motherless; for Rebekah had ‘been gathered to her fathers!’ Although we have not any account of her death, we may hope that repentance was sought by her ere it was too late. We are told that Rebekah was buried in the Cave of Machpelah, with Isaac, Abraham, and Sarah.*

* Gen. xl ix. 31.

Surely, we must all learn many valuable lessons from the deeply interesting and eventful life of Rebekah. Let us avoid partiality towards our dear children, and never show favour to one more than to another, remembering that each one has an immortal soul committed by God to our keeping to train for eternity.

May you never be tempted to take your children's part against your husbands, but be always loyal towards them. Above all, be truthful in word and act, open as the day, and scorning deceit. A mother should ever be, herself, what she wishes her children to become. Let us be faithful and persevering in prayer to our God, and then leave in His hands, all our plans and destinies, knowing that He ordereth all things for our real good and highest happiness. Let us often think over Rebekah's sins, and pray to our God to keep us from them for His dear Son's sake.

R U T H.

COLLECT.

O Almighty Lord, and everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to direct, sanctify, and govern, both our hearts and bodies, in the ways of Thy laws, and in the works of Thy commandments; that through Thy most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ruth, i. 16-18.

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

FOR every class of persons, for people of every age and country, who read the Scriptures, the story

of Ruth the Moabitess has a peculiar interest, a true fascination. The more we ponder upon it, the more we think over its details, the more it charms and excites us. And so, my dear friends, I have chosen it for our next meditation, trusting that by the help of God's Holy Spirit we may, one and all, derive much profit as well as pleasure, and learn many useful lessons from this romantic and sweet 'story of old.'

The account of Ruth is believed to have been written by the Prophet Samuel. In ancient times it was part of the Book of Judges, but was afterwards made into a separate book of 'Ruth.' It is a simple, natural story, and yet, as you will agree with me, strange and singular, too. Being placed in the Bible, amid wars, and battles, and blood-shed, it has been compared by an old writer to 'a peaceful cottage home in a battle-field.' In the times when the Judges ruled, there lived in the little town of Bethlehem, a man named Elimelech, which means, 'my God is King.' He married a wife named Naomi, or 'fair and pleasant.' They had two sons, named Mahlon and Chilion. That beautiful land, which flowed usually with milk and honey, was now visited by a severe famine; bread was very dear and very scarce.

The very name of 'home' is so sweet, that it takes a great deal to induce us to leave it; and, doubtless, with sorrow did Elimelech feel the necessity of leaving the land of Judah for the

country of Moab. ‘But hunger is a sharp master,’ and they all departed to the lands where food was plentiful, ‘and dwelt there.’

First, he himself died, leaving Naomi a sad and sorrowful widow, far from her loved country, in an idolatrous place. Then the two sons married two women of Moab, contrary to the Jewish law, which, doubtless, was a grief to this good woman. The name of one wife was Orpah, and the name of the other was Ruth.

For ten years their married lives went on. The Sacred Bible narrative does not give us any particulars of their home ; and there ‘Mahlon and Chilion died, both of them.’ And now the three widows are all desolate, and bereaved indeed. But soon Naomi heard the good news ‘that the Lord had visited His people,’ in her own native land, giving them bread again. She longed to return to that home which she never should have left ; the home, where she was known and respected, and where she might enjoy again the privileges of Israel, for which in her hour of sorrow her heart began to yearn. So she called her daughters-in-law to her side, and bade them each to return to their own mother’s house. Now Naomi had, (we have every reason to believe,) taught these two young women the true religion ; and, doubtless, this would greatly account for the love they bore to her, who, under God, had ‘led them from darkness to light.’ They had evidently made good

and faithful wives to her sons, for she spake thus to them : ‘ The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with me and with the *dead*.’

Thus you see, dear friends, that even among idolaters, it pleases God in His wisdom to call out one here, and one there, to be His true and faithful servant. You will all allow that Ruth was to us, in our enlightened Christian days, a bright and beautiful example of true piety, unselfishness, and faithfulness, both to the living mother-in-law and also to the memory of her husband.

Naomi proceeded to point out to them all the advantages of remaining in their own country, and, with tears and kisses, implored them to leave her to return alone to her own people. Both at first withstand her entreaties, and go with her. Then, when on the borders of Moab and Israel, she once more begs them to return, as she, a widow, friendless, and poor, could hold out to them no worldly prospects, no earthly advantages, such as they might have in their own land. This was not because she did not love them, but because she would have them count the cost. Just as the Bible puts before us the self-denial, the cross-bearing of the Christian life, not to hinder us from forsaking sin and giving our hearts to Christ, but that we may think well beforehand what we are about to do. We are told, ‘ They lifted up their voice, and wept again ; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her.’ Naomi’s entreaties

and arguments prevailed upon Orpah, and ‘she returned to her own people and to her idols.’ Like Demas, she loved this present world, and went back to a life without God, and (we must fear) a death without hope.

The mother-in-law, now having induced one child to follow her wishes, tries again her powers of influence upon the other, but in vain. In all the Sacred Scriptures there is not a more pathetic, touching, beautiful outpouring of a tender, loving heart, than that contained in these verses : ‘Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God : where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.’

But though Orpah fell away, Ruth stood firm. For ten long years she had loved her mother-in-law, and there was more to cling to in her, than she found in Moab. She was willing, as was Moses of old, rather to ‘suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin.’ Adversity is the true test of love and friendship. While we are rich and prosperous, many will cling to us and appear to value our affection ; but when sorrow, poverty, and trial come, then we learn who are our true friends. While others fall off, these cling to us the more closely. They strive to cheer our

loneliness by tender words of heartfelt sympathy, they help us in our distresses by many a little act of thoughtful kindness. A true womanly friend of this stamp was Ruth. She was ready and willing to exile herself from her own mother, and family, and country, to accompany the mother of the husband she had loved, into a distant, strange land. And there, not only to live with her, but to work for her daily maintenance with her own hands. All this she did cheerfully, not grudgingly, until she should lay her down to rest in the peaceful grave in her own dear land of Bethlehem.

'When Naomi saw that Ruth was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.' Actions will now prove the strength of Ruth's words. So together they came to Beth-lehem, 'in the beginning of barley-harvest.'

Beth-lehem ! the very name sends a thrill of mingled emotion through every truly Christian heart ; and had you dwelt there, my dear friends, as has been my privilege, you would readily understand that word bringing tears to my eyes, as I read the Scriptural history of that little city and the country around it. How well can I picture Naomi and Ruth, walking through its clean and picturesque streets, two widows—the one a stranger, the other brooding mournfully over the changes which have taken place, since last she trod those familiar roads and paths.

'All the city was moved, and said, Is this Naomi?' Doubtless she was greatly altered since she left Beth-lehem. Time, and, still more, sorrow, work great changes in the countenance and foot-step. She seemed to have lost everything but her name, and that name even she now desired to have changed. 'Call me not Naomi' (pleasant), 'but call me Mara' (bitter). In the bitterness of her soul did she make this request. A rich woman, of note and importance, she had left Beth-lehem, taking with her provisions and supplies for the journey; poor and 'lacking all things,' she now returns. Hear her own plaintive words: 'I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.'

And now, my friends, we see the humility of Ruth. Though brought up, as we should imagine, in comfortable circumstances, she is not ashamed to go out and earn her own bread. She goes into the harvest-field to work, to glean corn for the support of herself and Naomi. The Lord had commanded Moses, when framing the laws for his people Israel, concerning the harvests, 'And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.' This was

a merciful provision, made by their Heavenly Father's hand, for the poor and for the stranger. And Naomi had a kinsman or relation of her husband's, 'a mighty man of wealth.' God orders all things for us, and often leads us forth by a way that we know not. We cannot tell 'what a day may bring forth,' but our cry should ever be, 'Lead Thou me on.'

The story of Ruth has often been called 'a chapter in God's providence,' and so it is indeed well termed. Ruth came, and she gleaned in the field after the reapers, and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz. The right of gleaning was given, by a direct law from God, to the widow, the stranger, and the poor;* but to glean behind the reapers could never be claimed as a right by any one, but must be asked as a great favour of the owner of the harvest-field. There was nothing to show her which was Boaz's land. There were no hedges, or fences, or any other division, only stones set up as landmarks; so that it was quite 'by chance,' as we often call God's guidance, that she came into her rich, but distant, relation's fields.

The scene that follows is exquisitely beautiful. The great man Boaz comes from Beth-lehem into his fields, and says unto the reapers, 'The Lord be with you;' and they answered him, 'The Lord bless thee.' Would that this manner of speaking,

* Deut. xxiv. 19-21.

or the good and kindly feeling which prompted it, was found on every farm in England. If the farmer prayed for his servants, and they for their master, if each day's work was begun by both with family prayer, there would be fewer disagreements than there are. Boaz then noticed Ruth—doubtless her gentle, modest manner and her industry struck him—and he inquired, ‘Whose damsels is this?’ She had come forward to the steward or overseer of the reapers, and, with respectful courtesy, asked of him the favour she desired of Boaz, ‘I pray thee let me glean, and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.’ And this request having been granted to her, she had diligently worked from morning until evening, except that for a short time in the heat of the sun in the middle of the day she rested awhile: ‘She tarried in the house.’ This means, in the tent always placed in the field for the rest and refreshment of the reapers and gleaners.

The reaping in these fields was performed by women, while the sheaves were bound together by the stronger arms of men. They work thus together to this day in Syria, as I have often seen. ‘Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens; let thy eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? Then she fell on her face, and bowed her-

self to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband ; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord ; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens. And Boaz said unto her, At meal-time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers : and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not : and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not. So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned : and it was about an ephah of barley.'

Now Boaz not only granted to Ruth the privi-

lege she had craved, of gleaning after the reapers, but he also provided for her refreshment and comfort, as you read that he said unto her, ‘And when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.’ These vessels were bottles, made of camel or goat-skins, or of leather, and were filled with a thin, weak wine, made of the common grapes which grew in the beautiful vineyards around Beth-lehem in great abundance. In these Eastern lands they do not make or drink beer, for hops are not grown there. Bread soaked in weak vinegar, is to this day much eaten in the East, and thought by the natives to be a most nourishing and cooling diet. You will often have read in the Scriptures of these leathern bottles. Abraham, when he sent away Hagar into the wilderness, ‘put it upon her shoulder’ (Gen. xxi. 14). Heber, the Kenite, from just such a bottle, produced milk for the wearied, thirsting Sisera, ‘and gave him to drink’ (Judges, iv. 19). Hence our blessed Lord spake, saying, ‘No man putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish; but new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved.’ ‘Parched corn,’ too, is to this day much eaten in Syria. The gleaners take the new corn, rub it in their hands, and then roast it and eat it on the spot, while resting.

The whole scene of that harvest-field is thus vividly brought before us, dear friends. The

gleaners following up the harvest-gatherers; Ruth, a stranger, courteously received and welcomed among them; the reapers, in their loose Eastern dress, of those gay colours in which they delight, resting in the tent in the heat of the day, partaking of their frugal meal; and the kind and gracious master, Boaz, speaking from time to time to them in a friendly, courteous tone.

I remember when we were encamped, or living in tents, as you will understand, at Hebron, near to the threshing-floors, we were amid scenes exactly like these described in the Book of Ruth, and we saw from one to two hundred reapers and gleaners together, working joyously, and singing a kind of Arabic chorus at their work. So little have these Eastern customs changed since those Bible days.

Boaz having given such kind and liberal orders to his servants, Ruth gleaned a great deal in the day, and after she had satisfied her own wants, she had some corn left for Naomi. And Ruth took it to her mother-in-law, and told her of the kindness of Boaz to her. Naomi was greatly cheered and pleased, at hearing all Ruth had to tell her, and advised her to accept the generous invitation of her kinsman, and not to stray away into any other fields, as this might displease him, after his goodness to her. Doubtless the aged mother knew of the great man's relation to them, and had earnestly prayed that he might be led to acknowledge it.

In what had happened she saw the answer to her prayer.

How strange it seems to us to learn, that though Boaz was a great man, very rich, and could afford to employ many hands to work for him, yet he himself 'winnowed barley in his own threshing-floor!' This operation was always performed in the evening, in order to catch the cool breezes which spring up after the sun has set. And this duty the master undertakes himself. When wearied, Boaz probably lay down upon an Eastern rug, resting in the same clothes which he had worn all day. According to the simple rural habits of these people, it was quite right and proper in Ruth, as his kinswoman, to go and lie down crosswise at his feet, where Eastern servants usually sleep. And more than this, she took a part of the coverlid which was over Boaz, and covered herself. This act signified a demand for protection. Boaz awoke at midnight and found Ruth there, and said, 'Who art thou?' She answered, 'I am Ruth, thine handmaid.' He then blessed her with a fatherly blessing, and encouraged her as a friend. 'And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast shown more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.'

And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman : howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.'

Had Boaz been the next of kin to Ruth, he could have married her at once, according to the law of Moses ; but as there was a nearer kinsman, he must first consult with him, ere he could take Ruth for his wife. He told her then to bring her veil to him. Eastern veils are like large sheets, as I described to you, and cover the whole figure, and are made of a white cotton material. And into this veil Boaz put six measures of barley, which must have made a very heavy load for any woman to carry, and he sent her into the city. He did not wish her to return empty to her mother, for true love is generous, and not grudging in its gifts. On telling Naomi all that had passed since they had parted on the previous evening, her advice to her daughter was, 'Sit still, my daughter.'

Dear friends, this was good and wise counsel at this time. The Scriptures tell us, 'Tarry thou the Lord's leisure ; 'In patience possess ye your souls.' Few trials are greater to us, at some important moments of our lives, than to be quiet and calm and restful. To 'commit thy way unto the Lord,' to leave the future in His hands, is our safest, truest course at all times, and under all circumstances.

Then Boaz calls the next morning the near kinsman of Ruth before the ten elders of the city, and they went up together to the gate, which was a

favourite meeting-place in all Eastern cities for business and for pleasure. In a short conversation the matter was satisfactorily arranged between Ruth's nearest kinsman and Boaz, and the latter was left free to marry the woman he truly loved. 'So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife.' And now, in her great prosperity, she is still as loving and affectionate to Naomi, as when both were poor widows, struggling for their daily maintenance.

Ruth had many virtues, and among them shone highly respectful behaviour to the aged, self-forgetfulness, care for the feelings and wishes and necessities of the widowed mother of her husband. Ruth bore her great sorrows uncomplainingly, nay, cheerfully, her bereavements and her poverty without murmuring, and now she bears even a severer test of her religious character—prosperity. No vulgar pride makes her, in her now exalted position, to feel ashamed of the unpretending Naomi, or wish to be rid of her from her new home. There she ever makes her welcome, and doubtless, by her dutiful conduct towards her, she smoothes that aged, wrinkled brow, and soothes those infirmities which must come to us all with declining years. As the happy, thankful wife of the good and kind Boaz, she could procure for her beloved Naomi all that she could desire to make life easy and quiet. Thus we see, dear friends, that 'godliness hath the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come.' Even here, our

Heavenly Father is sometimes pleased to send blessings upon those who sacrifice themselves and their own welfare and happiness for the good of others, as did Ruth. And now they share together their prosperity, as once they shared in exile their adversity, which God was pleased to send to them. Ruth's wealth is Naomi's wealth ; her home Naomi's home ; and so she truly fulfilled the vow and promise made to her mother in those sad days gone by, 'Where thou lodgest, I will lodge.'

In due course the virtuous wife becomes a happy mother, and a son is born into that home of joy and peace. A great man, indeed, is that helpless babe destined to be. He was called 'Obed,' and the women who always gather around the mother on these happy occasions, were loud and fervent in their expressions to Naomi. 'Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.' 'And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.' And Obed, which means 'servant,' was, as we all know from Scripture, 'the father of Jesse, the father of David.' So that this simple, but sweet character, was indeed highly honoured above all the mothers of those days in Israel, for she was chosen to be the great-grandmother of a king, even of David, and far, far better, an ancestress of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, her Saviour, and ours.

HANNAH.

COLLECT.

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, who knowest our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking ; we beseech Thee to have compassion upon our infirmities ; and those things, which from our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, vouchsafe to give us, for the worthiness of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1 Sam. i. 1-10.

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite : and he had two wives ; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah : and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his

wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions : but unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion ; for he loved Hannah : but the Lord had shut up her womb. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb: ~~And~~ as he did so year by year, when she went up ~~to the~~ house of the Lord, so she provoked her ; therefore she wept, and did not eat. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou ? and ~~why~~ ^{why} eatest thou not ? and why is thy heart grieved ? am not I better to thee than ten sons ? So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord. And she was in bitterness of ~~soul~~ and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore.

HERE we read the account of a wealthy Israelite, named Elkanah, a native of Beth-lehem, ~~and~~ Levite, that is, one of the tribe appointed ~~to be~~ ministers of God. He was a good man, but ~~had~~ in one thing, fallen into sin or rather folly, ~~before~~ God—he had married two wives. For although 'bigamy' was permitted in those early Hebrew days, 'for the hardness of men's hearts,' it was not approved by God, and was contrary to His ordinance—'from the beginning it was not so.' As was ever the case, wherever this error, this unhallowed custom is mentioned in the Scriptures, there was great unhappiness in the home. The names of his wives were Hannah and Peninnah. 'Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.'

Among the Israelites this want was felt to be a great and sore privation, not only because they loved their little ones, if possible, more intensely than did the mothers of any other nation, but also because each hoped to be the mother of the promised Messiah who, according to God's promise, would be the 'seed' of Abraham. In spite, however, of Hannah's great misfortune, Elkanah dearly loved and claved tenderly to his first wife. This caused great and bitter jealousy in the heart of Peninnah, of whom we are told that she was Hannah's adversary, and 'provoked her sore to make her fret.' What a woman was this! A wife trying to hurt the feelings of another, and to wound her upon a point, on which she felt so deeply, so keenly.

How unamiable, how unkind, how heartless, was her conduct! Now, mark, how Hannah behaved under this constant worrying trial. She never retaliated, or returned evil for evil! Her love of God had already taught her to 'endure grief, offering wrongfully.' Moreover, though Elkanah could not conceal that he loved Hannah more than he did her rival, yet we never find that Hannah resented Peninnah's conduct toward herself by reminding her of this on any occasion. No, Hannah had 'the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price.' And God helped her to bear those sufferings, and mockings, and comforted her under them, as we

shall see: ‘He resisteth the proud, **but** giveth grace unto the humble.’ *

There was ‘no king in Israel’ in those days, and ‘every man did what seemed right in his own eyes.’ The worship of the Almighty was therefore greatly neglected by all classes. But even those who were disposed to it, were discouraged and hindered by the wickedness of two of the priests, the sons of Eli the High-priest of that day. Nevertheless we find that Elkanah went up three times a-year to Shiloh to worship the Lord his God, and to offer sacrifices.

But we read that Elkanah not only went to Shiloh himself, but his wives and his children. He not only served God himself, but took care that as far as in him lay, his family should serve Him also: he cherished family religion. Like Abraham, he commanded his children and his household after him that they should keep the way of the Lord. Every father and mother should go and do likewise; they should look well to the ways of their home in this as in other matters, with the resolve of Joshua in their heart, ‘As for me *and my house* we will serve the Lord.’

When the children of Israel offered a ‘peace-offering,’ the fat (as being the best) was burnt on the altar to the Lord, a certain portion was given to the priest, and the remainder was eaten by the offerer and his family or friends. In Elkanah’s

* 1 Pet. v. 5.

distribution of the meat of his peace-offering we discover his love and fondness for Hannah, for we read, ‘Unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion.’ This little act of preference kindled in the heart of Peninnah raging jealousy, for we are told, ‘She provoked Hannah, so that she wept and did not eat.’ Her tender husband noticed this, and in gentle words, asked the cause of her unhappiness, ‘Hannah, why wepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee, than ten sons?’ The good woman for his sake makes an effort, and tries to cast aside her sorrow, and takes food. ‘So Hannah arose after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk.’

But she did more than this. Eli, the priest, we read, was sitting upon a seat by the Temple, and Hannah was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. Although Hannah would not speak against Peninnah to her husband, she had one compassionate Ear, ever ready to listen to the cry of the sorrowful and heavy laden; to pour out her sorrows to her Heavenly Father, she went up to the Sanctuary.

Here is a good and useful lesson for us all to learn, dear friends. I have often heard the remark, ‘I could not go to Church, I felt too sad.’ What a great mistake this must be! The good men of old time thought very differently. David when perplexed and troubled ‘went into the Sanctuary

of God,' and there found relief. Hezekiah received a disagreeable letter, and once he 'went into the House of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.' And we have far more encouragement to go there than they ever had. For Jesus, our Advocate with the Father, is specially present there, to hear and answer the prayers of His people, to comfort, guide, and bless them, as He Himself has said,* 'Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I, in the midst of them.' If only you all knew more of the gladness of heart, the consolation and peace to be found in the house of the Lord, the rich blessings to your souls, you would all go there, more frequently, with willing, joyful steps, husband, wife, and children, as one family, an unbroken circle, if so God wills. No trifling cause would keep you, from treading the courts of the Lord's House, at least once, on every day of rest, for you would cry out with David, 'Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth.'

In the Sanctuary we now behold Hannah praying, and weeping sore unto the Lord. And she vowed a vow, and said, 'O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Thine handmaid, but wilt give unto Thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come

* Matt. xviii. 20.

upon his head.' She prayed, you see, with earnestness, and from her heart, as those pray, who really desire, and earnestly long, to have their petitions granted. Yet her prayer was only uttered in her heart ; her lips moved, but there was no sound of her voice to be heard !

And for what did she offer this heartfelt prayer ? For a son, a 'man child,' the birth of which among the Easterns is even now considered a honour, while the mother of a female babe, is an object of pity and sympathy. I have often heard Arab women lament, 'Poor creature, she has only a daughter born to her.'

While Hannah was thus praying to her God, Eli the High-Priest was sitting near, and watching her. After observing that she seemed to be whispering to herself, he came to the conclusion that she had taken too much wine. This good man spoke sternly and harshly to her, doubtless, feeling angry that she should dare thus to defame the house of God. 'How long wilt thou be drunken ? put away thy wine from thee.' Unhappy Hannah ! many and varied were her trials and sorrows, but doubtless her God comforted her under them all.

To be misunderstood, and misrepresented is always painful, and it must have been humbling to Hannah to be misjudged by so good and great a priest as Eli, in whose opinion she would, no doubt, like to stand high, feeling for him, and for his office, great respect and reverence. Now, we might

all expect her to leave him, really angry and indignant at this painful charge, but when we are in the right, our feelings are, by the help of God, more easily subdued. Remember that when we are justly accused of a fault, we are far more apt to yield to angry passions, than when we are innocent of the charge brought against us.

'And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit : I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial : for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace : and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.'

She replied to him, 'No, my lord.' The true Christian is never rude and uncourteous, but is kind, gentle, and respectful, and 'beareth all things, endureth things.'

'God seeth not as man seeth.' He as 'pitifully beholds the sorrows of our hearts,' now, as He did the deep sorrow, emotion, and anxiety of Hannah, then. And God made Eli to speak words of comfort to .Hannah and expressed the hope, which she doubtless received as a prophecy coming from God Himself, that her earnest petition would

be granted to her in God's own good time and way. For we are told, 'The woman went out, and did eat; and her countenance was no more sad.' She had done, as we are ever wise to do, follow the Divine command implicitly, 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee.'

Once more the family of Elkanah worshipped before the Lord, and then they returned to their home at Ramah, far happier than they left it. Hope sprung up in Hannah's heart, and we all know how sweet a feeling is hope, do we not? 'And the Lord remembered Hannah.' Our God is an unchanging God, 'I am the Lord, I change not.' Truly we can one and all testify, 'The Lord hath been mindful of us, and He will bless us.' In due time, after long and anxious, but patient, trustful waiting, a son was born to Elkanah and to Hannah, to brighten their home, cheer and gladden their parental hearts.

Happy and devoutly thankful was that pious mother now. Doubtless with the consent of her husband, she called her son 'Samuel,' which means 'Asked of God.' This name would always remind her not only of the goodness of her God, in granting to her the desire of her heart, but also of the solemn vow she had made unto Him, to dedicate her son to His service for ever. For the darling she had so long yearned to possess, was but a treasure lent to his fond parents for awhile, not as a toy to be played with, and an amusement to

them in their leisure, nor even to be the pride of their hearts, and the ornament of their home, but as an immortal soul, an heir of Eternity, a high and a holy trust, a loan lent to them to train for the 'King of kings.'

From his very birth, Samuel was specially given to God, and to His service. As he slept calmly in his little cradle, we are sure that Hannah would be constantly offering up her fervent prayer, that he might become a child of God, one of the true Israel. How precious must these peaceful hours have been to the fond mother, as she bent over her darling boy! And as day by day he grew in stature and in intelligence, she would train him step by step, to learn and know that 'wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.'

Hannah now greatly longed to accompany her husband once more to Shiloh, to give thanks in that Sanctuary, where she had so often wrestled in prayer with her God, for the treasure He had so graciously sent to her at last.

Prayer and thanksgiving should ever go hand in hand, as the Apostle Paul teaches us, 'continue in prayer, with thanksgiving.* But although she desired earnestly to 'give hearty thanks to Almighty God for His late mercies vouchsafed to her,' yet even for so sacred a cause she could not neglect her Samuel, and he was too young to

* Col. iv. 2; 1 Tim. ii. 1.

travel so far in safety. So Elkanah delayed not, but went up with all the rest of his house, to offer unto the Lord his yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow.

Hannah lovingly tended her babe until the time arrived to wean him. Some difference of opinion exists as to what was his age when weaned, but in all probability he was three years old. In Eastern countries I have often seen a child of three and even four years old, not yet weaned from his mother. ‘When she had weaned him, she at once took him up with her, with three bullocks, one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh : and the child was young.’

Yes ! poor Hannah must not shrink from fulfilling her vow and promise, made to God, and give up her only son, her little Samuel, to serve in His Temple for evermore. How bitter this trial, this parting, must have been to her affectionate heart, we who are mothers alone can imagine.

Hannah now once more appears before Eli, the High-Priest, but this time leading her precious child by the hand. Elkanah is there also. He joins with his wife in the dedication of Samuel, for whom he probably prayed with her. Humbly expecting Eli to have forgotten her altogether, she reminds him of who she is ; though with much delicacy, and true womanly tact and refinement, she does not allude to his unjust and painful remarks made to her, at her last visit to the

Temple. ‘I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed ; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord ; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he (Elkanah) worshipped the Lord there.’ Indeed she did not ‘offer unto the Lord that which cost her nothing,’ but the one possession, dearest to her heart, her own, her only, her darling child.

And now, Christian mothers, while we all love and reverence Hannah’s character in thus giving up her child to her God and His service, let us not forget, that we too as mothers are bound to dedicate our little ones to Him, to bring them to Jesus when infants, helpless and unable to present themselves to Him.

In Holy Baptism we are taught, in our beautiful and solemn service, thus to pray, when presenting our babes for this Sacrament : ‘We beseech Thee, for Thine infinite mercies, that Thou wilt mercifully look upon this child ; wash him and sanctify him with the Holy Ghost ; that he being delivered from Thy wrath, may be received into the ark of Christ’s Church ; and being stedfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally he may come to the land of everlasting life, there to reign with thee world without end ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.’ And therein we

give them up, gladly and thankfully, to the service of Christ : ‘ Manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue His faithful soldier and servant unto their life’s end.’

Before the pious Hannah left her son in the care of Eli, her grateful, thankful heart burst forth in a hymn of joy and gladness. Truly it might be said by her then, ‘ Thou hast put a new song in my mouth, even a thanksgiving unto our God.’

The expressions of her happiness remind us strongly of the hymn of praise afterwards chanted joyously by the blessed Virgin Mary, in the first chapter of Luke, where she sang, ‘ My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.’

Perhaps you may not understand Hannah’s expression, ‘ Mine horn is exalted in the Lord,’ so I will try in a few words to explain it to you in my simple way. Amid the mountains of Lebanon to this day, all married women wear a long horn of the same form as you have all seen upon the head of the unicorn, in the national coat of arms of our beloved Queen. This horn is made of different materials, according to the rank and riches of the wearer. The higher classes have them made of gold or silver, often set with rare and precious stones, while their poorer neighbours content themselves with horns of brass, and even (when very poor) of tin. The height of

them also depends upon their station in life : and this will explain to you the words of David, ' Lift not up your horn on high,' or do not dress above your position in which God has placed you. Again, the childless wife wears a horn of a certain height in a slanting position, but the happy mother is at once permitted and expected to wear a much higher horn, and may wear it erect upon their head. You will now understand, I hope clearly, Hannah's exultation, ' Mine horn is exalted '

By this slight change in this very curious head-dress, every one knows that the wearer has become a mother.*

Hannah had now to leave her child in Shiloh, 'to minister unto the Lord, before Eli, the priest.' How much do these few simple words contain ! The parting from her dearly-loved son must have given her bitter sorrow, though she would not have any fears for him, unless they were caused by anxiety, about the example set to him by the wicked sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas. She had, day by day, and hour by hour, taught him the first truths of religion, trained him for God's

* It is right to add that many deny all reference to this custom, of the existence of which, at that period, at least among the Jews, there is no proof, and regard it simply as a figure derived from animals whose strength is in the horns ; but my long acquaintance with Eastern customs leads me to believe that Hannah alluded to this headdress, when she cried, ' Mine horn is exalted.'

service, tried to instil into his young mind holy principles and good desires, taught him to ‘remember his Creator in the days of his youth,’ and now she must leave him, under God’s protection, to tread life’s paths, without his mother ever by his side.

As Hannah returned to Ramah, how often, how lovingly, would her thoughts go back to Shiloh, and her little son there. How melancholy must she have felt on entering her desolate home, how sad her heart, on her return thither. No sweet music of her darling’s childlike voice to be now heard there, no bright smile to cheer and welcome her when she entered the house, no pleasant converse with him, as each day his mind enlarged, and he brought out new thoughts and new ideas! No training, teaching of her Samuel! What a blank in that house must his absence have caused! how dull, how quiet it must have appeared to her and to Elkanah also! But she did not now murmur or complain of this change, but busied herself in her daily duties.

Perhaps she began at once to stitch away at the little coat, which her loving hands would make for her loved Samuel, to take to him once every year, when she had the joy of visiting him.

This little coat made by his mother before he was old enough to wear the linen ephod, is graciously mentioned to us in the inspired history. And, while this might seem to us but a trifling

incident, I think it is important, as showing the industry of this good, and simple woman. It teaches us that every mother ought to know how to make her children's clothes, and every girl should be taught needle-work, both at home and at school, so that she may have the knowledge when the time comes to use it. Thus everything in God's Holy Word is profitable, and we can derive instruction from every page of the Best of Books, if we read it prayerfully, saying, 'O God, open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.'

Though out of her sight, he would never be out of her mind, or of her fervent prayers. A 'mother's love is strong as death.' Our loved ones may be far away from us, and our hearts aching to press them to our bosom, but the precious comfort of being able to follow them with our prayers remains to us evermore. On our knees we can pour out our heartfelt supplication, as doubtless did Hannah very constantly, 'The Lord watch between me and thee, while we are absent the one from the other.'

Samuel saw much evil in the conduct of Eli's sons, but a pious mother's early counsels are but seldom really forgotten, and this child, so early trained for God, was, we believe, by Divine protection, 'kept from the evil,' and preserved steadfastly the holy principles he had been taught to love so well. Mothers! ever let us be assured that

in the training of our children, as in everything else, ‘as we sow, we reap.’ Eli was a holy man of God, but had one great and serious fault, ‘his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.’ ‘Spare the rod, spoil the child,’ is a true saying among us, and while such severe punishment as the rod should never be given for trifling faults, we should not spare it when sins are committed by our little ones.

Solomon tells us in the Proverbs, ‘He that spareth the rod hateth his son,’* and again, ‘A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.’ While, then, we must ever be tender, loving, and forbearing towards our children, let us never overlook sin, but firmly, decidedly, and constantly reprove whatever we see in them that is not according to God’s Word and Will. If this does not avail, let us affectionately punish them, never forgetting to lead them to the foot of the mercy-seat, in penitence and prayer, to seek for pardon and forgiveness, teaching them to cry out to God, ‘Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin; Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.’ What a contrast were the families of Eli and of Elkanah! Eli’s sons went on from bad to worse,—from one sin to another, while the child Samuel ‘grew and ministered unto the Lord.’

‘The Lord again blessed Hannah, and sent to

* Prov. xiii. 24.

her five more children,' to cheer her motherly heart, and to comfort her for the absence of the firstborn, Samuel, whom she had 'lent unto the Lord.' He has now grown into a boy of about twelve years old; and as of his blessed Saviour, in after years, at the same age, so the Scripture says of Samuel, 'He grew on, and was in favour, both with the Lord and also with men.'

Samuel had long ministered before the Lord; now he was to hear His voice. Toward morning, when the day was dawning, and the lights in the Temple began to wax dim, Samuel was sweetly sleeping, when he heard a voice calling to him, 'Samuel, Samuel.' Accustomed to prompt and willing obedience, he ran to Eli, and said, 'Here am I.' Eli replied, 'I called thee not; lie down again.' This happened a second, and a third time. 'Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child,' so he told him, 'if He call thee thou shalt say, Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.' Samuel then went and lay down, and the Lord came and stood, and called as at other times, 'Samuel, Samuel.' Then Samuel answered, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.' God then told Samuel of all the judgments that were to be sent upon the house of Eli. No one likes to be the bearer of bad tidings, especially to those whom we love and reverence. We do not find that Samuel was told by God to inform Eli of these coming sorrows, and he was not willing to

sadden the aged Priest by the news committed to him that night. But when Eli in the morning called Samuel, and questioned him, we read, ‘Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him.’

We are not told in the sacred narrative whether Hannah lived to see her son become a prophet, and a judge over Israel; but we do know that she had the high and holy privilege of seeing him as a servant of his God, ministering in His Temple. And this honour would be enough for that Christian ‘mother in Israel,’ for thus she would feel, that her vow was truly fulfilled, in that her child was indeed ‘lent unto the Lord.’

You, my dear sisters, will agree with me that we cannot but learn many valuable, useful lessons from the life and conduct of this pious Hannah. God grant that the religion which we all, I trust, profess, may tend to make us, one and all, as she was,—gentle, tender-hearted, forgiving. We have a brighter light of truth to shine upon our path than that which illuminated her footsteps, for we have not only the hope of a Saviour to come, but the knowledge that ‘our Redeemer liveth,’ and that ‘now is the accepted time; now is the day of Salvation.’

THE VIRGIN MARY.

COLLECT.

Almighty God, who hast given us Thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin ; grant that we being regenerate, and made Thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by Thy Holy Spirit ; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

We beseech Thee, O Lord, pour Thy grace into our hearts ; that, as we have known the Incarnation of Thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by His cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of His resurrection ; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Luke, i. 26-33.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David ; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou

that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee ; blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary ; for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest ; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David. And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.

FEELING ever a very deep responsibility, my dear friends, in bringing before you the lives and characters drawn from the Holy Scriptures, I have never felt my own ignorance, and my weakness, so fully as now, when I desire to meditate with you upon the most solemn, most interesting life of the Mother of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Ever needing, and, I trust, humbly seeking, the help of the Holy Spirit, 'to guide me into all truth,' when trying to explain in simplest language some passages of God's holy Word to you, I now earnestly desire, and would fervently pray for, a double portion of that Divine aid, while we approach the history of the Virgin Mary, written in the Book of Books, so closely interwoven with that of Jesus the Son of God.

The whole Bible, my friends, is full of Christ.

He is the one great theme of its pages. The Old Testament prophesies of Christ. As soon as man had fallen from holiness into sin, God promised to send down a Saviour. Then God chose Abraham out of a heathen country, and told him that out of his family a Saviour should be sent. Then afterwards all the prophets spake of Christ, and described His character. One of the most familiar prophecies to you and to me was that by Isaiah, 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.* After Jesus had come into this world, the four Evangelists each wrote an account of our Saviour's Life, of His Death, and of His glorious Resurrection. By 'searching the Scriptures,' then, dear friends, as written both in the Old and New Testaments, we may, as it were, dive into the well of truth, and learn all that is necessary to 'make us wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.'

Come with me, then, in thought and imagination, to the lovely village of Nazareth, nestling among the hills of Galilee.

The town stands high, built upon the slope of a hill, and is surrounded with olive-groves. The flowering myrtle, and the orange and lemon abound in its near neighbourhood, while at your feet is spread a carpet of wild flowers, of every tint and gayest colour, and fine tall date-palms wave above the city.

* Isa. vii. 14.

Yet it was a spot despised of men ; they asked, as did Nathanael, ‘Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ But it was richly honoured by God Himself, as He chose this peaceful, retired village (or small town) for His home on earth.

Nazareth has to this day a bright, clean, and cheerful appearance, containing about five thousand inhabitants, chiefly professing Christianity. Though not one building can be standing now which stood in those days, yet it is a holy privilege, my friends, to know that we tread there on the very paths where our Saviour’s feet trod, and look upon the same lovely blue sea stretched out before us, and upon the same hills, valleys, and plains. Yes ! we gaze upon the same Carmel, the valley of the flowing Jordan, and upon the same Hermon, with its crown of perpetual snow. The peaceful hours spent in Nazareth in happier bygone days, can never fade from my memory.

We are not told anything of the early history of the Virgin Mary. She was doubtless a descendant of King David, but neither her father’s nor mother’s name is mentioned in Scripture, nor her birthplace, or how she was educated by her parents.

When first we read of her, it is as a humble, simple maiden, living in Nazareth, engaged to a plain, unpretending man, named Joseph, probably much older than herself, by trade a carpenter.

As I had before occasion to mention to you, every devout Jewish maiden, from the days of Eve,

had hoped and longed to be the chosen n
the promised Messiah, while one after
was doomed to disappointment. So th
and so they died, 'not having recei
promises, but having seen them afar off.'

Now, Mary had doubtless read the Ol
ment Scriptures, for to our own day the
an example to us in their diligent stud
part of the Word of God.

'And in the sixth month the angel Gal
sent from God unto a city of Galilee
Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a ma
name was Joseph, of the house of David ;
virgin's name was Mary. And the angel
unto her, and said, Hail, thou that ar
favoured, the Lord is with thee : ble
thou among women. And when she s
she was troubled at his saying, and cas
mind what manner of salutation this sh
And the angel said unto her, Fear not, I
thou hast found favour with God. And,
thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and brin
son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He
great, and shall be called the Son of the
and the Lord God shall give unto Him th
of His father David. And He shall reign
house of Jacob for ever ; and of His kingd
shall be no end. Then said Mary unto th
How shall this be, seeing I know not
And the angel answered and said unto

Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee : therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age : and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the hand-maid of the Lord : be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.*

Mary, then, doubtless being thoroughly acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures, would not be surprised to learn from the angel Gabriel, who, as I have just read to you, was sent to her at Nazareth, that One was to be born into the world who should be called the Son of the Highest. But the wonder to the humble, modest Mary would be, that she, so little thought of by others around her, so lowly in her own eyes, should have been thus greatly honoured by being chosen to become the mother of the Saviour of Mankind. For though Mary had sprung from King David's royal line, yet was she poor, and of 'low estate.'

We shall all agree that she was, nevertheless, 'rich in faith,' and in the beautiful grace of humility, which God so loves. Hear the startling salutation of the angel, 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee ; blessed art thou among women.'

* Luke, i. 26.

We cannot wonder that when she saw the angel and heard his saying, 'she was troubled, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.' She was quiet, silent, and thoughtful, but the angel Gabriel cheered and comforted her by these gracious words, 'Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God.' In her trustful, simple faith she believed the angel, only asking, 'How shall this be?' And he went on to tell her these solemn tidings: 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.'

And then Gabriel went on to tell her some more startling news about her aged cousin Elisabeth, namely, that after many years of anxious, but disappointed hope, she was shortly to become a mother also, summing up all the wondrous announcements with these convincing words, 'For with God nothing shall be impossible.'

The gentle, trustful, faithful Mary was now bowed down in lowliest prostration and submission before God. She did not shrink from the great burden of honour which God had been pleased to send upon her; she received it as meekly as she had received her poverty. Her heart bowed low in love and adoration to her God, and her short and humble reply to the angel was, 'Behold the hand-maid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.'

And now that the angelic interview was over, and Mary left alone, how she must have thought over and over again of all that had passed ! How changed must her whole future life have appeared to her ! How glorious, yet how solemn, her future hopes and expectations !

But now look at Mary's position. She was the betrothed wife of 'a just' man, Joseph, and as such (should the angel's words come true) the reproach heaped upon her by the Jewish law, and by her own people, would be so severe that she might even be put to death. But her faith and trust in God were so strong that she did not seem to fear the tongue of scorn, but resigned herself into God's hands. At the same time, most naturally, her young and warm heart yearned for sympathy. She could not allude to what lay so near her heart to Joseph. Her modesty banished such a thought. She longed for a woman's sympathy and love ; so she turned to her cousin Elisabeth. Longing, then, to tell into some kind ear her joyful secret, Mary rose in haste, left Nazareth, and took the long, fatiguing journey over the hills of Galilee, by Beth-lehem, to Hebron. But remember, the one great secret of her peace and happiness was, that 'the Lord was with her.' With her Heavenly Father ever near, to guide, protect, and lead her onward, she 'feared no evil,' but could say from her happy heart with David of old, 'Thou upholdest me with Thy right hand.'

We do not know whether the angel Gabriel was the first to promote this cousinly friendship, or whether the cousins had, as is probable, met before at the annual feast in Jerusalem. Zacharias and Elisabeth were old people, but served God faithfully, and they were not forgotten by Him. After years of fervent, but unanswered prayer, Zacharias once more went up to perform his priestly office in the Temple of the Lord. It fell to his lot to burn the incense. As he stood by the altar, an angel appeared to him, saying, ‘Fear not, Zacharias; thy prayer is heard: thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.’ So that the cousins were bound together by a common joy and a similar hope.

And in those future hopes were the names of the greatest ever born of woman—Jesus, and John, his forerunner.

Mary entered the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. ‘And Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.’

And then, my dear friends, did the joyful Virgin Mary burst forth into that beautiful and glorious song of grateful joy and thanksgiving

which has from that hour to this re-echoed through the hearts, and found utterance in the lips, of every devout worshipper of her Saviour and her Son.

'And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden : for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things : and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with His arm ; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things ; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy ; as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.'

Yes ! *her* Saviour ! Mary, the honoured above all women on this earth, the 'highly favoured,' acknowledges in these words that her beloved son must also be *her* Saviour, that she is of human nature, and therefore born in sin, needing, in common with all her fellow-sinners, a Redeemer, and remission of her sins by shedding of blood.

The whole course of her life, every word she ever is recorded to have spoken, tell of humility and a deep sense of her own unworthiness. She

speaks of herself as of low estate, among the poor and the hungry, needing mercy herself, and therefore not to be placed as an intercessor between God and man, as the Church of Rome would teach us to believe.

Mary knew well that whatever men might think of her in those days, 'all generations should call her blessed' in times to come. And so must all true Christians call the Virgin Mary, 'blessed' as the mother of Jesus. Do you not think she was 'blessed,' 'highly favoured,' indeed, above all other women? But though blessed, she must never be spoken of as equal to her Divine Son, who is 'God over all, blessed for evermore.'* Jesus Himself afterwards admitted that His mother was blessed, but He added, 'Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.' Mary was raised far above all women in any age by being called to be the Mother of Jesus in His human form; but though thus blessed, she must not be worshipped, for have we not the Divine command, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord God, and Him only shalt thou serve?'

After enjoying three months' visit to Elisabeth, Mary returned to Nazareth; and here a new and great trial awaited the modest maiden, for we read thus in St. Matthew's Gospel:—

'Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when as His mother Mary was espoused

* Rom. ix. 5.

to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife : for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS : for He shall save His people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife : and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son : and he called His name Jesus.'

Joseph had evidently loved and respected Mary, and doubtless with deep sorrow heard of her condition. Being just and also kind, he was 'minded to put her away privily.'

What a trial to a pure-minded woman like Mary, to have been even suspected of wrongdoing by any one, especially by him whom she loved and valued, and to whom she had promised herself as a

wife! But *sin* alone brings *shame*, and, to those who are falsely accused, the behaviour of the innocent Virgin Mary at this time will bring comfort. 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in Him, and He will make thy righteousness as clear as a light, and thy just dealing as the noon-day,' though He may not clear it up by sending an angel as He did on this occasion to Joseph.

All this time Mary lived at Nazareth, but seven hundred years before the time of which I am now speaking to you, the prophets had foretold that the Saviour of the world should be born in Bethlehem of Judæa. This town was seventy miles distant from the place where Joseph and Mary were living, nor were the poorer classes given to much travelling in those days. But God has His own designs and His own method of bringing them about. Cæsar Augustus, the first of the Roman emperors, gave forth a command that all the world (as he proudly termed his empire) was to be taxed. A few weeks more, and the prophecy of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem would not have been fulfilled; but as every family, high and low, rich or poor, had to go to their own city, Joseph and Mary were compelled to go up to Bethlehem, the city of David, to whose family both Joseph and Mary belonged. And thus was the prophecy of Micah and the purpose of God fulfilled, and in the city of David was born the Saviour, Christ the Lord.

The little town of Bethlehem was at this time

overcrowded with visitors, so that when Mary arrived at the inn, wearied with the long journey, undertaken at a time when she was so totally unequal to it, and, longing for rest and quiet, no room was to be found for her. What must have been now her distress and discomfort ! She was thankful to rest in the part appropriated to the cattle, perhaps in one of the caves of the hills, which were often used as stables. Here the Lord of life and glory entered into this world as a little helpless babe, and was laid by His Virgin mother in a manger ! From this expression, 'Mary laid him,' we gather that Mary had no one at hand to help or relieve her, but must tend her precious Babe herself, even in this hour of nature's weakness and prostration.

Are we not astonished, amazed, at the condescension of the Son of God, in thus entering this world in poverty and in great humility ? Let us remember why He left the bright realms of glory above, and His Father's right hand—to redeem us from sin, to save us from everlasting death, and to 'open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.' So He took upon Him the nature of sinful men, and opened His eyes first, not in a palace, but in a stable.

Yet, though cradled in a manger, angels announced His birth. In the green fields around Beth-lehem faithful shepherds were watching their flocks by night, lying upon the grassy slopes, when an angel out of heaven came unto them and said,

'Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.' And immediately this good news was confirmed by a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will toward men.' This glorious song has been handed down to us from generation to generation. 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' Is not this a sweet and a blessed strain, dear friends, for us and ours to sing ?

Immediately the shepherds had heard of their Saviour's birth, they hastened to see Him, to worship and adore Him, and then told the joyful tidings to every one in the city and neighbourhood.

At the end of forty days the Virgin went up to the Temple of the Lord, to offer her sacrifice and to present her firstborn son there. Simeon, an aged and devout man, who had long been 'waiting for the Consolation of Israel,' and who had been promised by God that he should not die till he had seen the Lord's Christ, was moved by God's Spirit to go into the Temple at that same moment, and was shown, in the poor woman's* infant whom he saw there, the Messiah for whom he had so long been looking. Nothing staggered by seeing the Divine King of Israel in such a humble form; he took Him in his arms, and blessing Him, said,—

* She offered the poor woman's offering, see Lev. xii. 8.

'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word : for my eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people ; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel. And Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed hem, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, his Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel ; and for a sign which shall be spoken against ; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'

Mary must have felt deeply these sad and gloomy words, 'Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,' uttered by an aged saint of God, and at a time too when her own heart was so filled with joy and gladness at the precious gift which God had sent to her. We find that her whole character had from that time forth a shade of melancholy about it as she thought over these strange and ominous words of Simeon.

As yet the Saviour had been only the 'glory of His people Israel,' but at the moment of His birth here had risen in the skies of the far East a strangely beautiful star, which the 'wise men' * of those parts, who studied the stars, at once recog-

* Num. xxiv. 17, They would also have learnt much from Daniel (ix. 24, 25), who was himself one of the 'wise men' in his day.

nised as being sent to proclaim the birth of the expected King of the Jews. At once these men, as rich and noble as the shepherds of Beth-lehem were poor and humble, started on their long and perilous journey to show their respect to the new King. They at length reached Jerusalem, some little time after Mary's visit to the Temple. Their arrival, with their long train of servants, camels, &c., caused not a little stir, but still more did their inquiry, 'Where is He that is born King of the Jews?' And Herod, who had usurped the throne, became afraid lest the infant who was '*born* King of the Jews' should get it from him, and so determined to kill Him. To carry out his wicked purpose, Herod summoned the wise men, and desired them to go and 'search diligently for the young child, and when they had found Him, to bring him word, that he also might go and worship Him.' Directly they started the star again appeared; 'and when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.' They were led by it to the place where Jesus lay, and when they saw the young child and his mother, they fell down and worshipped *Him*. Mark well, they did not worship *them*, nor His blessed mother in any way; they worshipped Jesus alone. 'And they presented to Him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh,'—the best of their possessions, as it was but meet to offer to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Commanded by God, they return to their own

country without seeing Herod again, and God mercifully warned Joseph to take the young child and His mother into Egypt, to escape the fury of the disappointed king. This counsel he obeyed, and Herod, still hoping to kill Jesus, and to revenge himself for having been mocked of the wise men, sent and slew all the children who were in Bethlehem and the coasts thereof (*i.e.*, the neighbourhood), from two years old and under.

The wretched tyrant, however, soon died, and then Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, by God's command, returned to their former home in Nazareth.

And now, dear friends, how happy, how peaceful, must that village home have been; that 'Holy Family' living in love and unity; Mary, a pattern mother, quietly performing her daily labours at her good husband's side, and each day loving and admiring more and more the perfect character of her sinless Son. What an interesting study must a perfect boy have been! We have never seen such an one, for there has been but One, in this our world, free from every taint of sin, 'pure and undefiled, separate from sinners.' No passions ruffled His life, no evil tempers of His ever marred the calm serenity of that peaceful, best of homes. Jesus was obedient to His earthly parents—submissive, docile, affectionate. But once, did He cause His loved mother even an anxiety, and then He was fulfilling His duties.

When twelve years of age, His parents took

Him up to Jerusalem, at the feast of the Passover. In the holy City they remained for a week, and, for the first time, the Saviour trod the Temple courts. Doubtless there were many other children within those hallowed walls, of all ages and characters—some, perhaps, thoughtful and reverential, but the greater number, probably, children-like, in being careless and fidgety. Not one child was full of holy, pure, and heavenly feelings, as was Jesus. As a devout boy, He would go through the solemn Temple services with reverence and with 'holy worship.' Long ere He beheld the city He had doubtless loved 'the habitation of God's house' and the 'gates of Zion.'

Ponder well upon the next scene in the Saviour's history. Their days being fulfilled in Jerusalem, they again left the holy city, to return home. At the end of the day, doubtless, the tents were pitched for their night's rest, and the parents sought their beloved Son, but found Him not. Knowing Him to be ever a favourite with all around Him, they thought it probable that He had joined relatives and friends in their caravan, or company. But after searching fruitlessly for Him, the fond mother becoming naturally anxious, they returned to Jerusalem to seek Him there. At last they found Him, to their great surprise, in the Temple, sitting among the 'doctors' or rabbis, and learned men, 'both hearing them and asking them questions.'

And now Mary mildly rebuked Him, saying,

'Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.' We can picture the loving Jesus running to His mother, and she, clasping Him to her bosom with joy at having found Him at last, after all her anxiety for Him. But what does Jesus reply to her remonstrance? 'Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' Here Mary first learned that Jesus knew His Divine origin. This answer was not made disrespectfully, for in obedience and reverence to His parents, the Saviour was ever a perfect example to all children. He indeed fulfilled to the letter the fifth commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother;' but He now spake as the Son of God, the King of kings. It seems as though Mary spake of the human *father* alone, while Jesus thought and spake only of His Heavenly *Father*. The sacred writer then adds, 'And He went down with them, and was subject unto them,' as though we were not to gather from this scene that the gentle Jesus had become unfilial, or was already wishing to throw off all parental restraint.

And now for eighteen years the Saviour lived in quiet and seclusion, at Nazareth, amid those loved, and lovely hills of Galilee. It is believed that during this time Joseph died, for his name is never again mentioned in the Saviour's history.

The sweet story of the youth of Christ is closed to us, but these years, passed at Nazareth

must have been the most peaceful of his life. He spent them in working as a 'carpenter'* for His mother,—who was now, we believe, a widow,—comforting, cheering, supporting her, which all true sons love to do for their mothers, especially in their sorrow and old age.

When the account of the Saviour's public ministry is told to us in the Scriptures, we hear but little of His mother. His Heavenly Father had the first and highest claim upon His love, His time, His willing service. This was the very first lesson taught by Jesus to His mother. And, we are told, 'Mary kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart.'

Jesus must now leave the happy home of His childhood in Nazareth, and go forth to work for His God, to suffer and to die, 'for us men and for our Salvation.' Only two or three times after this, is Mary mentioned. The first time was when the Saviour performed His first miracle in Cana of Galilee, at the marriage feast. The wine provided by the host was not sufficient. Mary said to Jesus, 'They have no wine.' She had, it would seem, some reason for believing that He could, with a word, supply this need, but instead of so doing, He turned and said unto her, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.' Now the term 'woman,' which sounds to us so cold, so distant, was not really so. It meant more kindly

* Mark, vi. 3.

ness than, with us, would be conveyed in the word 'madam,' or 'my lady,' and was intended to convey respect and deference. At the same time our Lord meant gently to hint to the Virgin Mary, that though she was His mother as a man, she had no claim to His obedience as God.

Mary accompanied Jesus to Capernaum, where she had the privilege of seeing Him healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and preaching to all around Him. Seeing Jesus thus occupied about 'His Father's business,' truly her heart must have 'rejoiced in God her Saviour.'

But yet how often must this mother's tender, loving heart have bled, at the contempt and scorn with which her blessed Son was treated, and at the bitter enmity called forth by His gracious words, 'who spake as never man spake.' Then to see Him, the Blessed One, the meek and lowly, the Lamb of God, betrayed by His own friend, forsaken and neglected by His own disciples, led before Pontius Pilate ! What must have been her sorrow, her distress !

But even more than this had the loving Mary to endure. Picture, you Christian mothers, her agony of soul at the cruel scourgings, the crown of thorns placed upon that lovely brow, the mocking, the insult, the shame ! And then to hear (if indeed she heard it) that awful cry, 'Crucify him ! crucify him !' Few words, but full of helpless sorrow, of unutterable woe, are these : 'And

there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother.' Yes, His beloved, gentle, tender, best of mothers, who had borne Him, nursed, tended, reared Him, and had loved her perfect Son with a love strong as death, 'surpassing the love of woman,' she stood by His cross and witnessed His Passion. 'Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?' might she well have asked!

But even in this stupendous agony, the blessed Virgin Mother had holy, God-sent comfort poured by her Divine Son into her mourning, sorrowing heart. He who is 'full of love, whose compassions fail not, and is plenteous in mercy,' could not fail in His love and tenderness towards her, from whom He took His mortal, human nature. No, my sisters, while life remained, Jesus remembered His mother. His loving eye beheld her, full of grief and sadness, weeping by His cross; and in true, son-like consideration, with His dying breath He intrusted her to the beloved disciple John, saying first to Mary, 'Behold thy son!' and then to John, 'Behold thy mother!' And 'from that time that disciple took her to his own home,' where her grief was doubtless too deep, too sacred, to be recounted even in Holy Writ.

A few days of anguish unspeakable, and then the 'Sun of Righteousness arose,' and the joyful, glorious cry resounded, 'He is risen.' Her blessed Son had vanquished Death, and burst the tomb, and 'brought life and immortality to light.'

We do not know whether Mary held personal converse again with the risen Saviour during the forty days He dwelt on earth, previous to His glorious Ascension into heaven ; but we are told, as the last notice we have of the Virgin Mary, that after Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples, having returned from Bethany to Jerusalem, ‘continued with one accord in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus.’

Thus, dear friends, in dwelling carefully and prayerfully upon the life and character of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we find very much to admire, to love, and, by the help of her most blessed Son, to imitate. Mary had taken much of her Saviour’s gentle, loving, forgiving spirit, and would doubtless, when standing by His cross, re-echo His dying, touching prayer, even for His murderer, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ Her sweet, womanly character, we must ever remember, was, among others, traced and ‘written for our learning and example.’

May each one of us, then, in our different spheres of life, as women, wives, and mothers, imitate, in love to Christ, this ‘handmaid of the Lord.’ Then may we one day humbly hope to be called by Mary’s Lord ‘My mother or My sister.’ For Jesus Himself hath said, ‘Whoso doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, My sister and *mother*.'

THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

COLLECT.

O merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Resurrection and the Life; in whom whosoever believeth shall live, though he die; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in Him, shall not die eternally; who also hath taught us, by His holy Apostle Saint Paul, not to be sorry, as men without hope, for them that sleep in Him. We meekly beseech Thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness; that, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Him; and that, at the general resurrection in the last day, we may be found acceptable in Thy sight, and receive that blessing which Thy well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear Thee, saying, Come, ye blessed children of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world: grant this, we beseech Thee, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer. Amen.

Luke, vii. 11-15.

And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with

Him, and much people. Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother.

THERE is among us one class of mothers, dear friends, who have a peculiarly strong claim upon our sympathy; I mean the widowed mothers. These verses which I have just read to you tell us of such an one, a 'widow indeed,' bereaved and doubly afflicted. Not only had she lost the mainstay of her life, her guide, her companion, her husband, but also her only son. Her only child is taken from her, and can no longer comfort her in her sorrow, or aid her in her loneliness. This is an exquisitely touching story, not surpassed in the Holy Scriptures for pathos, for beauty, and simplicity. For here we behold Jesus, as indeed the 'man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,' bestowing upon all the same gracious and loving kindness and tender mercy.

Jesus was at Capernaum, and had just healed with a word, and even without seeing him, 'the Centurion's servant,' as a reward for the faith of his Gentile master. The day after, Jesus went into a

city called Nain, one day's journey from Capernaum. It was about two miles south of Mount Tabor, under the hill of Hermon. It lies to this day embosomed in olive-yards, in a retired situation; and Jesus never paid any other visit to Nain than this. Coming out of the gate of the city, He met a funeral procession. All Eastern cities, as I have before explained to you, had then, and have now, walls around them, and gates, which are locked at sunset or soon afterwards. Hence the allusion, 'The gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there.'*

Let me now try to describe to you, an Eastern funeral procession. It is very different in its appearance, to those in our country. I have often witnessed one, and the customs of Orientals are not at all changed since the days when Jesus lived on earth.

All the relations, in ordinary clothing, men, women, and children, attend, and added to them are some women, who are hired for the occasion to utter piercing shrieks and mournful cries, such as, 'O my master!' 'O my glory!' 'O my father!' 'Alas! for him; alas! for us!' The relatives and friends, as they slowly move along, often tear out their hair and rend their clothes, and I have seen them beating their own faces, in outward demonstration of grief. Coffins were not used then, nor are they now employed in those countries.

* Rev. xxi. 25.

The dead are carried upon an open ‘bier,’ made of four planks of wood, with their faces entirely exposed to view. The sight is at once solemn, and often appalling.

‘Behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.’ The funerals in hot climates take place on the very day of death; so that her bitter grief was at its first agony, in all its freshness, the first burst of woe scarcely over.

‘The *only* son !’ All our children are precious, or ought to be dear to us, and I often wonder at the heartlessness of those who, when one of a family is taken away by death, remark, ‘There are many left.’ You will all, as mothers, agree with me, that each of our loved children fills its own niche in our hearts, which no other child, or any number of children, can ever replace when vacated. But there must be, I am persuaded, a mournful aggravation of grief and sorrow when our ‘one’ and our ‘only child’ is taken from us, and we are left ‘childless,’ doubly sorrowing for having once tasted the joys of parental love and interest.

This was evidently a good mother, and her only child was a good son to her, for we read, ‘much people of the city was with her.’ They were respected by their neighbours and friends. Jesus saw her, ‘and had compassion upon her.’ ‘His compassions fail not, but are new every morning;’ and so He sweetly said unto her, ‘Weep not.’ Oh,

how much had she already, in those few first hours of her affliction, ‘wept sore!’ Nature’s fountains must be unstopped under such griefs. Tears are a relief to the bursting heart. It has been well said that ‘tears restrained are tears doubled.’ Tears are but human, and are never forbidden in Scripture, except on this memorable occasion, when Jesus Himself was about to dry the mourner’s bitter tears, and ‘turn her sorrow into joy.’

Jesus now came and ‘touched the bier, and they that bare him stood still.’ This respect they paid to the calm majesty and dignity of the Saviour’s command, silently given, for He only *touched* the bier, and thus stopped the funeral procession. All eyes doubtless were now turned upon Him; they stood still, and anxiously watched what would happen.

‘And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.’ Mark this: Jesus spake with Divine authority—‘I say unto thee.’ When the apostles worked miracles, they ever worked them in the name of Jesus, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ But no aid need be invoked by Christ. ‘I say unto thee, Arise.’

‘And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.’ The dead from the other world heard that solemn, powerful voice. The spirit returned into the lifeless clay, the colour into that pale face, the light into that glazed eye, so lately closed in the *sleep of death*. The heart began to beat, the lips

were unclosed, the tongue again unloosed, and the fond, rejoicing mother heard once more, the loved and loving voice, to which she again would listen, as to sweetest, purest music.

'Jesus delivered him to his mother.' This seems to us, as mothers, the crowning point of admiration of our gracious Saviour's love and thoughtfulness. The son whom God had taken from her but a few short hours before, is restored, by the Almighty power of Jesus, to her loving care, to her thankful heart, to her home again. My friends, no wonder 'that there came a fear on all, and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up amongst us, and that God hath visited His people.' If any sight could fill them with awe and reverence, surely it would be to see the dead thus brought back from death unto life before their eyes.

The simplicity of this beautiful story is most remarkable. 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' But observe, idle curiosity or sentiment is never gratified by details in the Bible histories. How very much we should all like to know further about this story ! But here, as on the only two other occasions when Jesus raised the dead to life, namely, in the resurrection of Lazarus and of Jairus' daughter, perfect silence is maintained about the world from which they had returned.

What they felt when exchanging earth for Paradise, when the ransomed spirit left the poor suffering body, and wended its upward flight ; what they beheld in those glorious regions above ; and, on the other hand, what were their sensations when recalled from the realms of bliss back to earth, with its cares, its sorrows, its numerous temptations, with the knowledge that for a second time they would have to die, to pass through the dark 'valley of the shadow of death ;' all this Scripture doth not reveal to us.

But still, how very much is taught to us of varied truths in this beautiful little story, which has for centuries drawn tears from the mourner's eyes, and yet all the while has comforted thousands of aching, riven, wounded hearts ! How many valuable lessons may we, one and all, derive from it, for our instruction and true comfort in this life, and for our hope in the world to come.

All must die. The aged, who have passed the allotted age of man, threescore years and ten, must die. The young may at any moment be called hence. It was in the bloom of youth, in the pride of manhood, that the son of the widow of Nain was called to leave his lonely, sorrowing mother, and this bright earth, with its attractions and pleasures, to go 'hence and be no more seen.' And the summons may come to me, to any one of you, at any moment, in any place, at any age. If, then, as we all well know, life is so uncertain,

death so very sure, ought we not to 'be prepared to meet our God,' so that whenever He sees fit to send for us we may be found watching, and ready for our great and solemn call ?

Again, we learn that Jesus is able and willing to comfort us, under all kinds of affliction. Doubtless, some of those who followed that procession had, as kind neighbours or loving relations, watched beside the sick bed of that young man, and had witnessed the strength giving way day by day, the feebleness increasing, the breathing more and more laboured, and then becoming soft and low, until it ceased altogether. And that poor, afflicted, widowed mother would cry out, doubtless, with 'an exceeding great and bitter cry, "He is gone." I shall go to him ; but he will not return to me.'

Christian mothers, have you ever passed through scenes like these ? Have you stood hour by hour at the sick-bed, watching the drooping, wearied head, the cheek fading, the eye becoming dim, of one who is dear to you as life itself, and felt that your earnest prayer that the precious one may be spared to you will not be granted, for that the 'Lord hath called the child ?'

Have you had to bear this agony without him that is dearest to you, to aid you in sharing this overwhelming sorrow; no husband by your side to wipe the scalding tear from your eye, and to whisper gently to you when all is over, and the

spirit hath returned to God who gave it, ‘He is not dead, but sleepeth?’ If this sorrow has been yours, then, indeed, you can somewhat imagine the grief of the widowed mother of Nain. Yes, and you may faintly picture her unutterable gladness when the joy of her heart was restored to her. We can just get some faint glimmering of her rapturous gratitude, for many of us have received our little ones from the very brink of the grave, in answer to our earnest and fervent supplication for their restoration to us.

Not only was this young man raised to life, but Jesus made him strong and well, and able to walk and to talk as before his death. So kind, so tender, so thoughtful, so compassionate, was Jesus to this poor widow!

And He is all this still to us. Hath He not said, ‘Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive ; and let thy widows trust in me?’* David speaks of God as ‘a Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows.’†

At the grave of Lazarus ‘Jesus wept.’ What a wonderful record of His Divine compassion is contained in these two short words! How comforting is it for the bereaved people of God, in all ages, to think over those two thrilling words, and remember that ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.’

Again, let us all remember, that the same voice

* Jer. xl ix. 11.

† Ps. lxiii. 5.

which raised Lazarus from the grave, the daughter of Jairus from her sick bed, the son of the widow of Nain from his bier, will one day wake all the dead. It will raise them from the sleep of death in all countries of the world. Every grave, and every resting-place, by land, and by sea-shore, and ocean, 'shall yield up its dead.'

What a solemn day will that be : 'The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the Resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the Resurrection of damnation.'

We are told that the 'dead in Christ shall rise first.' Oh ! what happy, blessed reunions will then take place ! Parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, ministers and people, long parted on earth, in sorrow, tears, and weeping, meeting again 'in joy unspeakable,' never more to part ; to be for 'ever with the Lord,' in 'glory everlasting !'

Do we, one and all, my sisters, hope and expect to take part in this 'First Resurrection ?' Are we now earnestly seeking Salvation, pardon, peace ? If we are thus 'turning to God with all our hearts,' then let us remember, that He is very pitiful and of tender mercy, full of compassion, and will 'never leave or forsake us.'

And whether He sees fit to send upon us prosperity or adversity, joy or sorrow, let us trust Him. Let us trust Him 'in the time of our

wealth,' being assured that He will deliver us from presumption, and too great love of the world. In time of trial, let us trust Him, knowing that He careth for us; that He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; that He 'healeth them that are broken in heart.' We shall find Him to be a 'very present help in time of trouble,' here, and He will point our sorrowful eyes to that blest kingdom above, 'where the Lord God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces.'

DORCAS.

COLLECT.

O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth ; send Thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before Thee : grant this for Thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Acts, ix. 36-42.

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas ; this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died ; whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come,

they brought him into the upper chamber ; and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed ; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes ; and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa ; and many believed in the Lord.

ALL over our land, my dear friends, is the name of Dorcas used in these days for benevolent Institutions and charitable Societies. When we hear of a 'Dorcas Society' we know and understand at once, that its object is to 'clothe the naked,' and to provide raiment for those who cannot get it for themselves.

The Holy Scriptures do not give us, in general, more than one or two examples of each particular grace or work of love and of mercy. Thus the name of 'Mary' speaks to us of one who deeply loved her Saviour, and had chosen 'that better part, which should never be taken away from her.' That of Martha as of one 'given to hospitality.' Joanna ministered unto Him 'who had not where to lay His head.' Mary Magdalene was an example of the true penitent sinner; Lazarus, of a poor, patient, suffering cripple. And the honoured name of 'Dorcas' is ever associated *in all* our minds with a kind, good, charitable

woman, who made garments for her poorer neighbours.

It is by no means certain, though generally believed, that she was married, and therefore, perhaps, Dorcas can scarcely be reckoned among the 'Mothers of Scripture.' But however this may be, the poor women whom she helped looked up to her as a mother, and she performed a true mother's part to them. I have, therefore, brought her character and history before you, my dear friends, as it cannot fail to be useful and profitable to us all.

In the short record of her life which I have just read to you, there is not any mention made of her early history. Her name was 'Tabitha,' or 'Dorcas.' Both these words mean the same thing ('doe' or 'gazelle') in different languages. She lived at Joppa, now called Jaffa. She spent her time in working humbly and modestly for God and for her fellow-creatures.

Truly we may say of Dorcas, that 'her works do follow her,' and by them 'she, being dead, yet speaketh.' I cannot imagine that anything would have been further from this quiet Christian woman's wishes than to be famous in this world, or to give her name as the founder of Institutions in distant lands and far-off generations. But so it has come to pass, and wherever the word of our God is known, like that of Mary, who anointed the blessed Saviour's head, these kindly acts and loving deeds of Dorcas, done for His sake, are told

'for a memorial of her.' 'For God is not unrighteous, that He will forget your works and labour that proceedeth of love, which love ye have showed for His Name's sake, who have ministered unto the saints, and yet do minister.'*

I cannot but think that Dorcas was not herself a poor woman, but a person of some wealth and importance, for it is said of her, 'This woman was full of good works and of almsdeeds which she did.' Now had she not been blessed with some means, this expression would not have been used.

How delightful it is, my friends, when God is pleased to give the power, and with it the will, 'to do good and to distribute!' Some, alas! among us have the silver and the gold, but they only care to spend it in pleasure and in amusement, for the perishing joys of this fleeting, fading world. Others have an earnest desire to 'feed the hungry, to clothe the naked,' but the means to do it, except in a very small degree, is not within their reach. But let what is done, be it much or little, if only it be done out of love for Christ, it is counted as done to Him; for He has Himself told us, 'Forasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

And for the gracious encouragement of those among us who are poor, He has said, 'Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a

* Heb. vi. 10.

cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward.* Little deeds of kindness shown by you one toward another are all known to Him.

It may be that you have but little to give of this world's goods, my sisters, but if you have a kind and tender, loving heart, you may do many a small act of kindness to a sick neighbour or friend. You will not adopt the phrase I so often hear employed by the selfish when asked by another to help them, 'I keep myself to myself;' but, on the contrary, you will seek opportunities of showing them that you are a humble follower of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who 'went about doing good.'

In this parish there is, thank God, many a true Dorcas, and specially, I believe, among the poorer classes, who are 'rich in faith.' I have frequently noticed the untiring, unwearying attention freely bestowed on one another in the hours of sickness and of trial by many among you, who otherwise, if not thus engaged, would be earning money at work. These, my friends, are the 'cups of cold water' which Jesus reckons up, and will acknowledge as services rendered to Himself.

We all well know one among us, whom, we are sure, is a true and devoted servant of Christ, giving up herself to His service, not rich in this world's riches, having but a scanty pittance on

* Matt. x. 42.

which to live, but who, by narrowing her wants, and cultivating a taste for simple things, has ever a few pence to give to those who are perhaps richer in reality than herself. You will find her at the bedside of the sick, smoothing the dying pillow, nursing a suffering child, and whispering gently of Jesus and His love.

She is ever forgetful of herself and of her own delicate health. She has ever a ready hand and ear, and a tear of pity, and a sweet voice of sympathy, for the woes and sorrows, for the cares and anxieties, of all around her. It is the happy business of her life to do good to others, like Dorcas of old ; and we believe that the smile of her Saviour encourages her in the labours of love which she so well undertakes, and so patiently performs. Divine charity, true love to God, is her ruling motive, and without this grace, St. Paul tells us that all our works are of no value in God's sight ; 'Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.'*

God does not look so much upon what we give to Him, as upon what we keep ourselves. Our gifts must be offered ever in proportion to our means. You all remember how graciously He noticed the poor widow in the temple, who cast in two mites, two half-farthings, into the treasury, while the rich worshippers were pouring in of their abundance

* 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

into its coffers. Jesus said, ‘She hath cast in more than they all.’ A mite to her was far more than many pounds to them; for when they had given, they probably did not miss the costly gift, but this poor widow gave her *all* to God, and left nothing for herself. God loves not only a liberal, but a ‘cheerful giver.’

Thus I trust I have proved to you, from the Word of God and from our own experience, that He has mercifully permitted even the poorest among us to do something for Him, in helping His people, perhaps ‘His little ones.’ For while our Heavenly Father denies to the needy the smaller joys of riches, He grants to them the greater blessedness of giving of their time, a willing, loving offering to Him, who gave for them all He had to give, for He gave Himself.

Such women as our dear friend and neighbour, we shall agree, not only make life a real happiness and pleasure to themselves, but also shed sunshine around them. As you have often said to me from time to time, ‘When Mrs. —— enters our cottage, she brings the sunbeams with her.’ Cannot we all strive to do the same? to live as Dorcas lived, a blessing to all around us, to die as Dorcas died, amid showers of tears, and heartfelt lamentations from the bereaved widow and the orphan, whose hearts in her lifetime she ‘had caused to sing for joy.’

Surely this is a true Christian woman’s highest,

holiest mission; this is the best preparation for Eternity. ‘The love of Christ should constrain us’ to work for Him. ‘I have given you,’ He said, ‘an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.’ And when ‘much has been forgiven us,’ surely we must love this Saviour the more, just as Mary Magdalene, after ‘seven devils were cast out of her,’ after very much had been forgiven her, is immediately mentioned as ministering to the wants of Christ.

Perhaps we may observe that Dorcas *made* ‘the coats and garments,’ though, if what we suppose is true, she could well have afforded to employ workers for her. She preferred the pleasure of making them with her own hands for God’s poor. Thus Dorcas fulfilled Lemuel’s description of a good woman: ‘She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.*

But ‘it came to pass in those days that Dorcas was sick, and died.’ We all naturally expect, ere the hour of our death arrives, that sickness will be sent to us, as a warning to ‘prepare to meet our God.’ But though this good woman had this season for solemn thought upon the end awaiting her, it is not granted to all. Death approaches in many various ways, and often suddenly, and in a moment snatches us from our every-day life and our ordinary pursuits. Then, if life has been spent,

* Prov. xxxi. 13.

like that of Dorcas, in thought and work for God and His people, we may hope that we shall enjoy the heavenly benediction, ‘Blessed is he that considereth the poor and needy; the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble.’*

This excellent woman seems to have been guided by a good and a ‘right judgment’ in dispensing her charities. The poor widows who stood by weeping after her death, and showing to Peter the memorials of her lovingkindness, in the coats and garments which she had made for them, prove that the objects of her bounties were worthy receivers, full of grateful feelings.

Peter, at this sad and sorrowful moment, having power given unto him from God, ‘put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed; and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise.’ Observe, Peter knelt in fervent, lowly prayer to God, to invoke His aid to perform this great miracle, which, without Divine help, he could not have attempted. So unlike our blessed Lord, who needed but to ‘speak the word’ to raise the dead to life again. By the power of Christ, then, Dorcas ‘opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.’

All these details are like word-painting in the sacred narrative, and enable us to picture so vividly the whole scene in that ‘upper chamber.’ Peter

* Ps. xli. 1.

now gave her his hand, and lifted her up, just as his master Jesus had done to Peter's own mother-in-law, 'when she lay sick of a fever.'* Thus was miraculous power granted to restore to life one so loved, so lamented, so truly mourned. Doubtless when recalled from the realms above to return to this earth once more, she redoubled her efforts to do good among her rejoicing friends, who would with gladness and thankfulness welcome back to their midst their kind and loved benefactress.

And here, my dear sisters, we must leave this interesting history, for the Word of God only tells us further, that the raising from the dead of this saint of God was the means of causing many to believe in the Lord. Oh! that the consideration of her life and death might prove a blessing to each one of us, in our various spheres of duty, so that when our last hour shall come, and we are summoned hence to appear at the bar of God's judgment, it may be said of every one of us, and of all who belong to this 'Mothers' Meeting,' 'She hath done what she could.'†

* Mark, i. 30, 31.

† Mark, xiv. 18.

SALOME.

COLLECT.

O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love towards Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Matt. xx. 20-28.

Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children, with her sons, worshipping Him, and desiring a certain thing of Him. And He said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto Him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left, in Thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto Him, We are able. And He said unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand, and on My left, is

not Mine to give ; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, ‘Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great, exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you : but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.

SALOME, the mother of whom we are about to speak to-day, is better known to us as the ‘mother of Zebedee’s children.’* Her husband Zebedee is little mentioned in Scripture. He gained his living as a fisherman, assisted by his two sons, James and John. It was to the possession of these their two sons, that both Zebedee and Salome are indebted for their mention in Holy Scripture.

It has been truly said, that ‘honour ascends, as well as descends, dear friends.’ Doubtless, Salome was a good and an industrious wife, a neighbourly and amiable friend, but the name by which she is most frequently and honourably known is the ‘Mother of Zebedee’s children.’ How much trial, care, and cost, do we all undergo in the birth, and

* The identification of ‘Salome’ with the mother of Zebedee’s children is rendered highly probable by comparison of Matt. xxvii. 56, with Mark, xv. 40 ; xvi. 1.

rearing, and education of our dear children ; but how much joy and happiness do they bring to our homes and hearts, what songs of thanksgiving do we sing to our God, when they grow up in the paths of holiness and virtue, 'increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man,' like their blessed Example, Jesus Christ. Now this privilege was eminently granted to Zebedee and to Salome.

We read in St. Matthew's gospel that James and John were in a ship with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets, and Jesus called them, 'and they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed Him.'

After this, we have no further mention of Zebedee in the sacred narrative ; whether his occupations as a fisherman took him to a distance, or whether, as is most probable, death removed him from the scene altogether, we are not told. We hear no more of his future career.

James and John appear to have been devoted brothers, constantly together, for their names are frequently mentioned in one sentence. The secret of their love for one another, was the love which they both had for their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Be well assured, my dear friends, that there is no love so pure, so hallowed, so firm, so lasting, as that which rests upon a common love for Jesus, the love of those who can say, 'We have fellowship

one with another,' because 'our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.'

John was of a gentle, tender, affectionate nature, but withal, strong in his attachments. His deep love to Christ was the one great passion of his life, and subdued his whole nature. Yet he could be filled with fiery zeal and indignation at any slight or want of respect to his Divine Lord; as, for instance, when the Samaritans refused to receive Him, and he and his brother, in their wrath, would have called down fire from heaven upon them.

He was, indeed, honoured above all the rest of Christ's disciples, in being the one best beloved by his Divine Master. Just as Abraham in the Old Testament was favoured by being called 'the friend of God,' so the Apostle John was dignified as the 'disciple whom Jesus loved.'* We read in the description of the Last Supper that there was leaning on Jesus' bosom (that is, 'sitting next to Him,' as we should say), 'one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved'; and in reference to the same occasion, it is said, in John, xxi. 20, 'Peter turning about and seeing the disciple whom Jesus loved following, which also leaned on His breast at supper, and said, Lord, who is he that betrayeth Thee?'

James is not specially described, when mentioned in the early part of this history; but we know he

* John, xiii. 23.

was full of zeal and love for his Master, and was one of the three favoured apostles permitted to witness the Saviour's glorious Transfiguration. Here they 'beheld His glory:' afterwards they were to be also 'partakers of His sufferings.'

We believe, my sisters, that Salome was not unworthy to be the mother of the Apostle St. John, and of St. James the Great; for on two solemn occasions is her name mentioned in the sacred narrative of our Lord's last days. Once, among the women of Galilee, who ministered so lovingly to their Saviour, 'among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and John, and the mother of Zebedee's children.* And a second time is she named, as coming very early in the morning with sweet spices to anoint the body of the Lord.†

From these facts, I think we may gather that Salome was herself a woman of great piety, and therefore that her sons had enjoyed the blessing of a Christian mother's early training. What, on this our earth, can compare with a mother's love, and care, and teaching? Believe me, dear mothers, those early lessons about Jesus, those tender, gentle words, now spoken to your little ones at your knee, though they may appear to have been forgotten by them, in after life will return to their memories, and by God's blessing having taken deep root in their hearts, will bear rich fruit

* Matt. xxvii. 56.

† Mark, xvi. 1.

to His glory, and to your comfort. ‘Cast thy bread upon the waters, and ye shall find it after many days;’ and oftentimes ‘They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy.’

Thus far have we traced Salome as a God-fearing woman, a mother who encouraged her sons to follow Christ, and to serve Him. We now find her coming to Jesus with an ambitious petition to Him, just before the solemn hour of His Crucifixion.

St. Matthew and St. Mark describe this scene somewhat differently. St. Matthew tells us, that Jesus called unto Him His twelve disciples apart, in the way when going up to Jerusalem, and in His own solemn manner, for the ninth time, impressed upon them all, that event ever uppermost in His own mind, His coming sufferings, His Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection. We are told ‘they understood none of these things.’ Immediately follows, ‘Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping Him, and desiring a certain thing of Him;’ while St. Mark tells us* that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with their own request.

We reconcile the accounts by the conclusion that the mother was the mouthpiece, or spokeswoman, for her sons, who thought it better to make so important a request by her lips. Perhaps they thought that Jesus would the more readily

* Mark, x. 35.

grant it for their mother's sake, to whom He ever listened so kindly, and to whom, as to all His sisters after the flesh, He always showed such tenderness.

The suit was no small favour, no slight request. Jesus encouraged her by the kind inquiry, 'What wilt thou?' 'She saith unto Him, Grant that these, my two sons, may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left, in Thy kingdom.' On her knees, as a suppliant, did she make her petition. She adored her Saviour ere she prayed to Him, as was indeed befitting.

Our Saviour had before told His disciples that they should sit upon twelve thrones, and judge the twelve tribes of Israel; but this was not enough for this ambitious mother to know. She wished her two sons to be before all the other disciples, and in the highest places of honour in the earthly kingdom, which both she and they thought, He was about to set up in Jerusalem. Truly, her love for them, had given her courage and boldness in their cause.

Now, mark the Saviour's gentle, but firm reply, 'Ye know not what ye ask.' Our blessed Lord was not displeased with her request, nor received it as though it were sinful, but with His usual gentleness and condescension seemed rather to compassionate the ignorance of the petition, the infirmity of the prayer. 'Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to

be Baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?'

Jesus spake of the bitter cup* of His agony and Passion, of His Baptism of suffering. Never was such a cup mixed in this world, and our blessed Redeemer was to drink it to the very dregs, until He could say, 'It is finished.' So bitter was it, that even the Saviour cried, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt.'† And St. Luke tells us that our Saviour kneeled down in the garden of Gethsemane, and prayed, 'Saying, Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done.' His was, indeed, truly called, 'A Baptism of blood!'

Knowing all that should be mingled in that cup of sorrow, Jesus asked His servants, James and John, the important question as to whether they could with Him bear all this. And in ignorance and blindness of heart they answered, 'We are able.' In their earnest desire for the privilege and honour which they craved, they knew not their powers, or rather their weakness. For, dear friends, when their strength of endurance was tried, what do we read? At the most solemn hour of their loved Master's agony, 'Then all His disciples forsook Him, and fled.' They knew not, you see, the mystery of Christ's Crucifixion. They did not

* Compare Ps. lxxv. 8.

† Mark, xiv. 36.

understand that the Cross was to be, for the present, the Saviour's earthly Throne.

'And He saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the Baptism that I am baptized with ; but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them, for whom it is prepared of my Father.'

Doubtless, James and John were perfectly honest and sincere in their determination to follow their beloved Master to any suffering which He might have to endure; but human nature at times caused their faith to fail. 'The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.'

We must not forget, that St. James was the first Apostle who proved to the world that he was able to be baptized with the Saviour's Baptism of blood, for he was the first disciple to shed his life-blood for Christ and His Church. 'About that time (eight years after our Lord's Ascension) Herod (Agrippa), the king, stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church ; and he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.*

John also lived a life of persecution in the evening of his lengthened days, for his love to Jesus, and constant testimony to His truth. So that you see though these 'holy men of old' had their faults, they were true and faithful followers of their Saviour, and we are well assured,

* Acts, xii. 2.

that as they 'suffered with Him, they shall also be glorified together.'

And now let us as Christian Mothers learn from this history many useful, profitable lessons. The most important is, the duty of bringing up our children 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' Let us teach them to serve Him in whatever state of life He has been pleased to place them; to promote His honour and glory, without looking for any reward in this world; 'to live, not unto themselves,—the most degraded and mean of all lives,—but 'unto Him who died for them, and rose again.' Once let this love have the mastery over their hearts, and far from expecting a recompense for what they do, the expression of their true feelings will be, 'If we had done all that was commanded us, we should be unprofitable servants; we should have done only that which it was our duty to do.'

Mothers! we shall never know, until the Great Day declares to us, the immense importance of our influence over the children whom God has given to us! Our example is of the utmost importance. 'An ounce of example is worth a ton of talk.' It is not what we say, but what we do, to which children pay most heed. Example is the backbone of teaching. Let us take care to practise ourselves, what we preach to them, otherwise they will laugh us to scorn, and all our pious teaching will do them *harm, and not good.*

But let both teaching and example be preceded and followed up by earnest prayer, otherwise our example will break down, and the seed of our teaching will fall on hard, unsoftened hearts. ‘At evening, at morning, and at noon,’ we must pray, not only *for* them, but *with* them,—pray earnestly, constantly, believingly, for their eternal Salvation. Often, too, we shall have to mingle our supplications at the throne of grace with tears; for a wayward, erring child is a parent’s daily sorrow.

Christian Mother! pray on, be not weary. Tell to Jesus, your Saviour, all your sorrows, anxieties, cares, griefs, necessities,—He knows them all, He counteth up your tears, and will grant all your petitions, in behalf of those so precious to you and to Him. Let us never rest until we can feel assured that all our children are safe in Christ.

Then may we joyfully look forward to that great day, when we shall all stand before the Great White Throne, and humbly say to Him that sitteth thereon, ‘Behold I, and the children which God hath given me.’*

* Heb. ii. 13.

—

**BOOKS SUITABLE TO BE READ AT
MOTHERS' MEETINGS.**

‘Thoughts for a Chimney Corner.’ By Miss Wordsworth.

‘Short Words for Long Evenings.’ By Miss Wordsworth.

‘Plain and Pleasant Words.’ By the Author of ‘Old Peter Pious.’

‘Ministering Children,’ and Sequel. By Miss Charlesworth.

‘Sunday Echoes in Week-day Hours.’ 5 Vols. By Mrs. Carey Brock.

‘Dame Wynton’s Home.’ By Mrs. Carey Brock.

‘Home Memories.’ ”

‘The Rectory and the Manor.’ ”

‘Margaret’s Secret and its Success.’ ”

‘My Father’s Hand.’ ”

‘Copsley Annals.’ By Miss Elliott.

‘Where Dwellest Thou?’ By Miss Charlesworth.

‘Bright Glimpses for Mothers’ Meetings.’ By

the Author of 'Home Thoughts for Mothers' Meetings.'

'Sunbeams for Mothers' Meetings.' "

'Vineyard Labourers.' By Miss Winscom.

'Jessica's First Prayer.' By Hesba Stretton.

'Alone in London.' "

'Little Meg's Children.' "

'Bede's Charity.' "

'Pilgrim Street.' "

'Fern's Hollow.' "

'Fishers of Derby Haven.' "

'Nothing to Nobody.'

'Froggie's Little Brother.'

'Good and Bad Managers.' By Miss Bailee.

'Stories on the Church Catechism.' By Mrs. Sherwood.

'I must keep the Chimes going.' By Miss Elliott.

'Sunbeams in the Cottage.' By Mrs. Gordon.

'Long Evenings.' By Mrs. Bayly.

'Climbing the Hill.'

'Margaret Warner.'

'Old Herbert and Alice.'

'The Four Sisters.'

'Waggie and Wattie.'

'Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars.' By Miss Marsh.

- ‘Life of Arthur Vandeleur.’ By Miss Marsh.
- ‘Caspar.’ By Miss Warner.
- ‘Worth her Weight in Gold.’
- ‘Words for Women.’ By Miss Bickersteth.
- ‘The Exiles of Babylon.’ By A. L. O. E.
- ‘A Trap to Catch a Sunbeam.’
- ‘Whiter than Snow.’
- ‘Taking the Consequences.’
- ‘The Motherless Boy.’
- ‘Buy your own Cherries.’
- ‘Rights and Wrongs ; or, Begin at Home.’
- Rev. T. B. Power’s Tracts—‘He’s Overhead,’
‘The Use of a Child,’ &c.
- ‘Christmas Eve.’
- ‘Abigail, or the Peacemaker.’
- ‘The Apostles of Jesus.’ By Mrs. Clere.
- ‘Bethlehem’s Three Mothers.’ “
- ‘Katherine Gordon.’ ”

LONDON :

Printed by JOHN STRANGEWAYS, Castle Street, Leicester Square.

|

By the same Author.

PRAYERS FOR LITTLE CHILDREN.

Second Edition. Royal 16mo. sewed, 1s.; cloth, 1s. 6d.

'Seldom have we met with prayers more suitable for very young children.'—*Mother's Treasury*.

'The Prayers are very suitable and beautiful.'—*Literary Churchman*.

'A pleasing little collection.'—*Guardian*.

'Thoroughly good Prayers.'—*Hive*.

'The Prayers are introduced by an address well calculated to arrest the attention of the very young, while the Prayers themselves are short and exceedingly simple in language, embodying all the necessary wants of childhood.'—*Christian Advocate*.

HATCHARDS, PUBLISHERS, PICCADILLY, LONDON.

For Mothers' Meetings, &c.

Just published, in square fcap. 2s. 6d.

1. PLAIN AND PLEASANT WORDS;
Or, READINGS AT MOTHERS' MEETINGS
ON JOB AND JEREMIAH.
With other Stories, and Sundays in the Sick-room.
By the Author of 'Old Peter Pious,' 'Sunlight for Sick-rooms,' &c.

By E. WORDSWORTH.

Just published, Second Edition, in square fcap. cloth extra, 2s. 6d.

2. SHORT WORDS for LONG EVENINGS.

'Deep, poetical, and sometimes quaint thought simply expressed, which renders it in our eyes a remarkable book, and we should be glad to see it on every drawing-room table.'—*Guardian*.

Third Edition, in square fcap. cloth extra, 2s. 6d.

3. THOUGHTS for a CHIMNEY-CORNER.

'One of the most delightful books we have come across for a long time.'—*John Bull*.

'These most useful and well-expressed Thoughts may be read with interest and profit at all our firesides, and are especially well adapted for reading aloud at Mothers' Meetings. Very cordially do we recommend the volume to the notice of our readers.'—*Mothers' Treasury*.

HATCHARDS, PUBLISHERS, PICCADILLY, LONDON.

THE COVENANT OF LOVE,

A MANUAL OF DEVOTION
FOR THE SICK AND SUFFERING.

Being Twenty-eight Readings, with a Prayer and Hymn to each.

By A. M. JAMES, Author of 'Christian Counsels,' etc.

Square crown 8vo. cloth, 2s. 6d. ; paper cover, 2s.

'Gentle, soothing, and at the same time ardently religious; it supplies just the special groove of thought which is needed for the sick-room.'—*Literary Churchman*.

'The prayers and meditations are well arranged and the type is excellent.'—*John Bull*.

'Short meditations, hymns, and forms of prayer are ranged under appropriate texts, and in each there will be found much that is helpful to the thoughtful Christian mind.'—*Rock*.

By **BISHOP OXENDEN, D.D.**

1. WORDS OF PEACE;

Or, THE BLESSINGS AND TRIALS OF SICKNESS.

51st Thousand. Fcap. *large type*, cloth, 1s. 6d.

2. THE HOME BEYOND;

Or, A HAPPY OLD AGE.

123rd Thousand. Fcap. *large type*, cloth, 1s. 6d.

3. GOD'S MESSAGE TO THE POOR.

20th Thousand. 18mo. *large type*, cloth, 1s. 6d.

4. THE LABOURING MAN'S BOOK.

44th Thousand. 18mo. *large type*, cloth, 1s. 6d.

HATCHARDS, PUBLISHERS, PICCADILLY, LONDON.

By the Author of 'The Peep of Day.'

1. Apostles Preaching to Jews and Gentiles;

Or, THE ACTS EXPLAINED TO CHILDREN.

18mo. Illustrated and Col. Map. Cloth, 2s. 6d.; roxburgh, 3s.

2. The Peep of Day.

A NEW DRAWING-ROOM EDITION.

Imperial 16mo. with 11 full-page Illust. printed in Colours by Marcus Ward. Cloth extra, 6s.; bevelled boards, 7s. 6d.

3. The Kings of Israel and Judah.

18mo. Illust. and Coloured Map, cloth, 3s.; roxburgh, 3s. 6d.

4. Precept upon Precept.

35th Thousand. 18mo. Illust. and a Map, cloth, 3s.; roxburgh, 3s. 6d.

5. The Peep of Day:

A SERIES OF THE EARLIEST RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

402nd Thousand. Illust. 18mo. cloth, 2s.; roxburgh, 2s. 6d.

6. Line upon Line.

A SECOND SERIES OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

Part I. 218th Thousand. Illust. 18mo. cloth, 2s. 6d.; roxb. 3s.

Part II. 173rd Thousand. Illust. 18mo. cloth, 2s. 6d.; roxb. 3s.

7. Lines Left Out.

30th Thousand. Illust. 18mo. cloth, 2s. 6d.; roxburgh, 3s.

8. More about Jesus.

45th Thousand. Illust. 18mo. cloth, 2s. 6d.; roxburgh, 3s.

9. Streaks of Light.

Or, FIFTY-TWO FACTS FROM THE BIBLE.

33rd Thousand. 52 Illustrations, 18mo. cloth, 2s. 6d.; roxb. 3s.

10. The Peep of Day Series.

The above Nine Vols., roxburgh, gilt leaves, in box, 12. 10s.

SCHOOL EDITIONS OF THE ABOVE.

In 18mo. limp cloth, with Illustrations.

THE PEEP OF DAY	...	...	...	...	Is. 2d.
MORE ABOUT JESUS	...	...	...	...	Is. 4d.
LINE UPON LINE. Two Parts, each	...	...	...	...	Is. 4d.
LINES LEFT OUT	...	...	...	...	Is. 6d.
STREAKS OF LIGHT	...	...	...	...	Is. 6d.
PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT	...	...	...	...	Is. 6d.
APOSTLES PREACHING (to follow).					

HATCHARDS, PUBLISHERS, PICCADILLY, LONDON.





